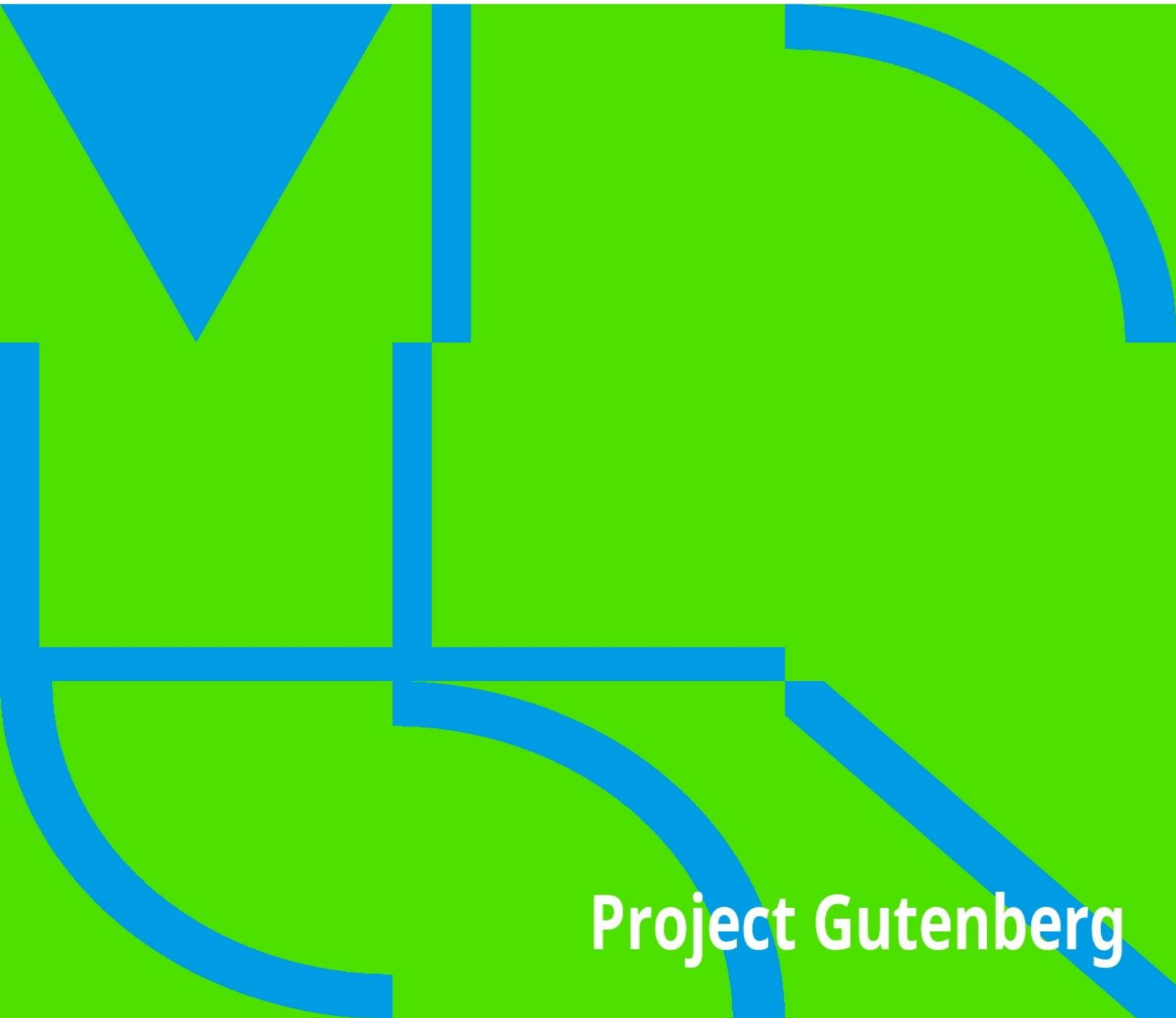
Still Jim

Honoré Morrow



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STILL JIM

Frontispiece
"AND THE FLAG FLUTTERED LIGHTLY BEHIND THEM AND THE DESERT WHISPERED ABOVE THEIR HEADS."—*Page 369*

STILL JIM

By HONORÉ WILLSIE

AUTHOR OF

"The Heart of the Desert," Etc.

ornament

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STILL JIM

CHAPTER I

THE QUARRY

"An Elephant of Rock, I have lain here in the desert for countless ages, watching, waiting. I wonder for what!"

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

Little Jim sat at the quarry edge and dangled his legs over the derrick pit. The derrick was out of commission because once more the lift cable had parted. Big Jim Manning, Little Jim's father, was down in the pit with Tomasso, his Italian helper, disentangling the cables, working silently, efficiently, as was his custom.

Little Jim bit his fingers and watched and scowled in a worried way. He and his mother hated to have Big Jim work in the quarry. It seemed to them that Big Jim was too good for such work. Little Jim wanted to leave school and be a water boy and his father's helper. Big Jim never seemed to hear the boy's request and Little Jim kept on at school.

The noon whistle blew just as the cable was once more in running order. Little Jim slid down into the pit with his father's dinner bucket and sat by while his father ate.

Big Jim Manning was big only in height. He was six feet tall, but lean. He was sallow and given to long silences that he broke with a slow, sarcastic drawl that Little Jim had inherited. Big Jim was forty-five years old. Little Jim was fourteen; tall and lean, like his father, his face a composite of father and mother. His eyes were large and a clear gray. Even at fourteen he had the half sweet, half gay, wholly wistful smile that people watched for, when he grew up. His hair was a warm leaf brown, peculiarly soft and thick. Little Jim's forehead was the forehead of a dreamer. His mouth and chin were dogged, persistent, energetic.

When he was not in school, Jim never missed the noon hour at the quarry. He had his father's love for mechanics. He had his father's love for law and order making, the gift to both of their unmixed Anglo-Saxon ancestry. When Big Jim did talk at the noon hour, it was usually to try to educate his Italian and Polish fellow workmen to his New England viewpoint. Little Jim never missed a word.

He adored his father. He was profoundly influenced by the dimly felt, not understood tragedy of his father's life and of the old New England town in which he lived.

Big Jim spread a white napkin over his knee and poured a cup of steaming soup from the thermos bottle. Tomasso broke off a chunk of bread and took an onion from one pocket and a piece of cheese from another. Big Jim and 'Masso, as he was called, working shoulder to shoulder, day by day, had developed a sort of liking for each other in spite of the fact that Big Jim held foreigners in utter contempt.

"Why did you come to America, anyhow, 'Masso?" drawled Big Jim, waiting for his soup to cool.

'Masso gnawed his onion and bread thoughtfully. "Maka da mon' quick, here; go backa da old countra rich."

"What else?" urged Big Jim.

'Masso looked blank. "I mean," said Big Jim, "did you like our laws better'n yours? Did you like our ways better?"

'Masso shrugged his shoulders. "Don' care 'bout countra if maka da mon'. Why you come desa countra?"

Big Jim's drawl seemed to bite like the slow gouge of a stone chisel.

"I was born here, you Wop! This very dirt made the food that made me, understand? I'm a part of this country, same as the trees are. My forefathers left comfort and friends behind them and came to this country when it was full of Indians to be free. Free! Can you get that? And what good did it do them? They larded the soil with their good sweat to make a place for fellows like you. And what do you care?"

'Masso, who was quick and eager, shook his head. "I work all da time. I maka da mon. I go home to old countra. That 'nough. Work alla da time."

Big Jim ate his beef sandwich slowly. Little Jim, chin in palm, sat listening, turning the matter over in his mind. His father tried another angle.

"What started you over here, 'Masso? How'd you happen to think of coming?"

'Masso understood this. "Homa, mucha talk 'bout desa landa. How ever'boda

getta da mon over here. I heara da talk but it like a dream, see? I lika da talk but I lika my own Italia, see? But in olda countra many men work for steamship compana. Steamship compana, they needa da mon', too, see? They talk to us mucha, fixa her easy, come here easy, getta da job easy, see? Steamship men, they keepa right after me, so I come, see?"

Big Jim lighted his pipe. "Tell Mama that was a good dinner, Jimmy," he said. "I haven't got anything personal against you, 'Masso," he went on. "You're a human being like me, trying to take care of your family. I suppose you can't help it that Italians as a class are a lawless lot of cut-throats. You certainly are willing workers. But I'd like to bet that if we'd shut the doors after the Civil War and let those that was in this country have their chance, this country would have a wholesomer growth than it has now. I'll bet if they had fifty men in this quarry like me instead of a hundred like you, it would turn out twice the work it does now."

"But Dad, they say you can't get real Americans to do this kind of work," said Little Jim.

"Deal with facts, Jimmy; deal with facts," drawled his father. "I'm working here. Will Endicott, John Allen, Phil Chadwick are all day laborers. Our forefathers founded this government and this town. What's happened to it and to us? It's too late for us older men to do much. But you kids have got to think about it. What's happened to us? What's happened to this old town? I want you to think about it."

Little Jim took the dinner bucket and started for home. His father had not been talking on a topic new to the Mannings or to the Mannings' friends. Little Jim had been brought up to wonder what was the matter with his breed, what had happened to Exham. Little Jim's forefathers had once held in grant from an English king the land on which the quarry lay. His grandfather had given it up. Farm labor was hard to get. The mortgage had grown heavier and heavier. The land all about was being bought up by Polish and Italian hucksters who lived on what they could not sell and whose wives and children were their farm hands. Grandfather Manning could not compete with this condition.

Big Jim had gone to New York City in his early twenties. He had had a good high school education and was a first-class mechanic. But somehow, he could not compete. He was slow and thoroughgoing and honest. He could not compete with the new type of workman, the man bred to do part work. When Little Jim was five, the Mannings had come back to Exham, with the hope of somehow,

sometime, buying back the old farm.

Little Jim passed the old farmhouse slowly. It was used for a storehouse for quarry supplies now. Yet it still was beautiful. Two great elms still shaded the wide portico. The great eaves still sheltered many paned windows. The delicate balustrade still guarded the curving staircase. The dream of Little Jim's life was to live in that great, hospitable mansion.

He passed with a boy's deliberation down the long street that led toward the cottage where the Mannings now lived. The street was heavily shaded by gigantic elms. It was lined on either side by fine Colonial houses, set in gardens, some of which still held dials and bricked walks; wide, deep gardens some of which still were ghostly sweet. But the majority of the mansions had been turned into Italian tenement houses. The gardens were garbage heaps. The houses were filthy and disheveled. The look of them clutched one's heart with horror and despair, as if one looked on a once lovely mother turned to a street drabble.

Little Jim looked and thought with a sense of helpless melancholy that should not have belonged to fourteen. When he reached the cottage, his mother, taking the bucket from him, caught the look in the clear gray eyes that were like her own. She had no words for the look. Nevertheless she understood it immediately. Mrs. Manning was nervous and energetic, with the half-worried, half-wistful face of so many New England women.

"Jimmy," she said, "Phil Chadwick just whistled for you. He went to the swimming hole."

The words were magic. They swept that intangible look from Jim's face and left it flushed and boyish.

"Gee!" he exclaimed, "he's early today. Can I have my dinner right off?"

"Yes," replied his mother, "but remember not to go in until three o'clock. I'm sure I don't see what keeps all you boys from dying! And how you can stand the blood suckers and turtles up there in that mud hole! Goodness! Come, dear, I've cooled off your soup so you can hurry. I knew you'd want to."

Will Endicott dropped in at the Mannings' that evening. Will was a short, florid man, younger than Big Jim. Little Jim, his hair still damp and his fingers wrinkled from water soak, laid down his *Youth's Companion*. Usually when Will Endicott came there were some lively discussions on the immigration question

and the tariff. Even had Little Jim wanted to talk, he would not have been allowed to do so. Among the New Englanders in Exham the old maxim still obtained, "Children are to be seen and not heard." But Little Jim always listened eagerly.

Endicott looked excited tonight. But he had no news about the tariff.

"There's a boy at my house!" he exclaimed. "He just came. Nine pounds! Annie is doing fine."

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Manning, while Big Jim shook Will's hand solemnly. "Oh, goodness! I didn't know—Why I thought tomorrow—Well, I guess I'll go right over now. Goodness——" and still exclaiming, she hurried out into the summer dusk.

"That's great, Will!" said Big Jim. "I wish I could afford to have a dozen. But they cost money, these kids. I suppose you'll be like me, never be able to afford but the one."

"He's awful strong," said Will, abstractedly. "To hear him yell, you'd think he was twins. Looks like me, too. Red as a beet and fat."

"Must be a beauty," said Big Jim. "That Wop that works with me has seven children about a year apart. Doesn't worry him at all. He just moves into a cheaper place, cuts down on food and clothes and takes another one out of school and sets him to work. They're growing up like Indians, lawless little devils. A fine addition to the country! I was reading the other day that by the law of averages a man has got to have four children to be pretty sure of his line surviving. And it said that we New Englanders have the smallest birth rate in the civilized world except France, which is the same as ours. And we've got the biggest proportion of foreigners of any part of America now, up here."

Will came out of the clouds for a moment. "I've been telling you that for years. What's the matter with us, anyhow?"

Big Jim shrugged his shoulders. "All like you and me, I suppose. If we can't give a child a decent chance, we won't have 'em. And these foreigners have cut down wages so's we can hardly support one, let alone two."

Endicott rose. "I just happened to think. I'm going to borrow Chadwick's scales and weigh him again. They're better than mine."

Big Jim chuckled and filled his pipe. Then he sighed. "We've got to go, Jimmy. The old New Englander is as dead as the Indian. We are has-beens."

"But why?" urged Little Jim. "I don't feel like a has-been. What's made us this way? Why don't you and the rest do something?"

"You'd have to change our skins," replied his father, "to make us fight these foreigners on their own level. I'm going to bed. No use waiting for Mama. There's a hard day ahead in the quarry tomorrow. That break set us back on a rush order. The boss was crazy. I told him as I told him forty times before that he'd have to get a new derrick, but he won't. Not so long as he's got me to piece and contrive and make things do.

"I tried to talk 'Masso and the rest into striking for it today, but they don't care anything about the equipment. It's something bigger than I can get at. It isn't only this quarry. It's everywhere I work. Always these foreigners are willing to work in such conditions as we Americans can't stand. Everywhere twenty of 'em waiting to undercut our pay. And the big men bank on this very thing to make themselves rich. You'd better go after your mother, Jimmy. This village ain't safe for a woman after dark the way it was before the Italians came. I'm going to bed."

The next night at supper Big Jim was very silent. When he had eaten his slice of cake he said in his slow way, "No more cake for a while, I guess, Mama."

Mrs. Manning looked up in her nervous, startled manner.

"What's the matter, Jim?"

"Well, I went with my usual kick to the boss about the derrick and he told me to take it or leave it. That work was slacking up so he'd decided on a ten per cent. cut in wages. I don't know but what I'd better quit and look for something else."

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed Mrs. Manning. She had been through many, many periods of job hunting since her marriage. "Keep your job, Jim. Next week is September and winter will be here before we know it. We'll manage somehow."

"I'll not go to school," cried Little Jim. "I'll get a job. Please, Dad, let me!"

"You'll stay in school," replied Big Jim in his best stone chisel drawl, "as long as I have strength to work. And if I can send you through college, you'll go. Don't you ever think of anything, Jimmy, but that you are to have a thorough

education? If anything happens to me you are to get an education if you have to sweep the streets to do it. That's the New England idea. Educate the children at whatever cost. I had a high school education and you'll have a college course if I live. And if I don't live, get it for yourself. I'll have another cup of tea, please, Mama."

"Well, it makes me sick!" exclaimed Little Jim with one of his rare outbursts of feeling, "to have you and mama working so hard and me do nothing but feed the chickens and chop wood. I'll give up the *Youth's Companion*, anyhow."

Mrs. Manning looked horrified. The *Companion* was as much a family institution as the dictionary. "How do you think you are going to be really educated, Jimmy, unless you read good things? Your father and I were brought up on the *Companion* and you'll keep right on with it. I'll get cheaper coffee, Papa, and we can give up cream. Ten per cent. That will make a difference of twenty cents a day. I'll turn my winter suit."

"I'll give up tobacco for a while," said Big Jim. "I was thinking about it, anyhow. It's got so it bites my tongue. I don't need any new winter things, but Jimmy's got to look decent. My father would turn over in his grave if he thought I couldn't keep the last Manning dressed decent. Maybe we ought to give up this cottage, Mama. The Higgins cottage is pretty good but it hasn't got any bathroom."

"If you think I'm going to let Jimmy grow up without a bathroom, you're mistaken," replied Mrs. Manning. "I've got a chance to send jelly and preserves to Boston and I'm going to do it. Don't worry, Papa. We'll make it."

When Little Jim took his father's dinner to him the next day, 'Masso's boy Tony was sharing 'Masso's lunch. His face was dust smeared.

"I gotta job," announced Tony.

'Masso nodded. "He bigga kid now. Not go da school any more. Boss, he giva da cut. I bringa da Tony, getta da job as tool boy. Boss, he fire da Yankee boy. Tony, he work cheaper."

"He's too small to work," said Big Jim. "You'd ought to keep him in school and give him a chance."

"Chance for what?" asked 'Masso.

"Chance to grow into a decent American citizen," snarled Big Jim with the

feeling he had had so often of late, the sense of having his back to the wall while the pack worried him in front.

Tony looked up quickly. He was a brilliant faced little chap. "I am an American!" he cried. "I'll be rich some day."

Big Jim looked from 'Masso's child to his own. Then he looked off over the browning summer fields, beyond the quarry. There lay the land that his fathers had held in grant from an English king. But the fields that had built Big Jim's flesh and blood were dotted with Italian huts. The lane in which Big Jim's mother had met his father, returning crippled from Antietam, was blocked by a Polish road house.

Little Jim didn't like the look on his father's face. He spoke his first thought to break the silence.

"Can't I stay for a while, Dad, and watch you load the big stones?"

"If your mother won't worry and you'll keep out of the way," answered Big Jim, rising as the whistle blew.

To industry, the cheapest portion of its equipment is its inexhaustible human labor supply. It was Big Jim who was sufficiently intelligent to keep demanding a new derrick. It was Big Jim who was adept in managing the decrepit machinery and so it was he who was sent to the danger spots, he having the keenest wits and the best knowledge of the danger spots.

Little Jim, sitting with his long legs dangling over the derrick pit, watched his father and 'Masso tease the derrick into swinging the great blocks to the flat car for the rush order.

The thing happened very quickly, so quickly that Little Jim could not jump to his feet and start madly down into the pit before it was all over. The great derrick broke clean from its moorings and dropped across the flat car, throwing Big Jim and 'Masso and the swinging block together in a ghastly heap.

It took some time to rig the other derrick to bear on the situation. Little Jim dropped to the ground and managed to grip his father's hand, protruding from under the débris. But the boy could not speak. He only sobbed dryly and clung desperately to the inert hand.

At last Big Jim and 'Masso were laid side by side upon the brown grass at the

quarry edge. 'Masso's chest was broken. The priest got to him before the doctor. Had 'Masso known enough, before he choked, he might have said:

"It doesn't matter. I have done a real man's part. I have worked to the limit of my strength and I shall survive for America through my fertility. What I have done to America, no one knows."

But 'Masso was no thinker. Before he slipped away, he only said some futile word to the priest who knelt beside him. 'Masso never had gotten very far from the thought of his Maker.

Big Jim, lying on the border of the fields where his fathers had dreamed and hoped and worked, looked hazily at Little Jim, and tried to say something, but couldn't. Once more the sense of having his back to the wall, the pack suffocating him, closed in on him, blinded him, and merged with him into the darkness into which none of us has seen.

Had Big Jim been able to clarify the chaos of thoughts in his mind and had he had a longer time for dying, he might have done the thing far more dramatically. He merely rasped out his life, a bloody, voiceless, broken thing on the golden August fields, with his chaos of thoughts unspoken.

He might, had things been otherwise, have seen the long, sad glory of humanity's migrations; might have caught for an unspeakable second a vision of that never ceasing, never long deflected on-moving of human life that must continue, regardless of race tragedy, as long as humans crave food either for the body or the soul. He might have seen himself as symbolizing one of those races that slip over the horizon into oblivion, unprotesting, only vaguely knowing. And seeing this thing, Big Jim might have paused and looking into the face of the horde that was pressing him over the brim, he might have said:

"We who are about to die, salute thee!"

But Big Jim was not dramatic. Little Jim never knew what his father might have said. Instinct told the boy when the end had come. His dry sobs changed to the abandoned tears of childhood as he ran down the street of elms and besotted mansions to tell his mother.

CHAPTER II

THE OLD SWIMMING HOLE

"The same sand that gave birth to the coyote and the eagle gave birth to the Indian and to me. I wonder why!"

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

Little Jim and his mother were left very much alone by Big Jim's death. Little Jim was literally the last of the Mannings. Mrs. Manning's only relative, her sister, had died when Jim was a baby. There was no one to whom Mrs. Manning felt that she could turn for help.

Jim pleaded to be allowed to quit school and go to work.

"I'm fourteen, Mama, and as big as lots of men. I can take care of you."

Mrs. Manning had not cried much. Her heartbreak would not give into tears easily. But at Jim's words she broke into hysterical sobs.

"Jimmy! Jimmy! I don't see how you can ever think of such a thing after all Papa said to you. Almost his last advice to you was about getting an education. He was so proud of your school work. Why, all I've got to live for now is to carry out Papa's plans for you."

Jimmy stood beside his mother. He was taller than she. Suddenly, with boyish awkwardness, he pulled the sobbing little woman to him and leaned his young cheek on her graying hair.

"Mama, I'll make myself into a darned college professor, if you just won't cry!" he whispered.

For several days after the funeral, Jim wandered about the house and yard fighting to control his tears when he came upon some sudden reminder of his father; the broken rake his father had mended the week before; a pair of old shoes in the wood shed; one of his father's pipes on the kitchen window ledge. The nights were the worst, when the picture of his father's last moments would not let the boy sleep. It seemed to Jim that if he could learn to forget this picture

a part of his grief would be lifted. It was the uselessness of Big Jim's death that made the boy unboyishly bitter. He could not believe that any other death ever had been so needless. It was only in the years to come that Jim was to learn how needlessly, how unremittingly, industry takes its toll of lives.

Somehow, Jim had a boyish feeling that his father had had many things to say to him that never had been said; that these things were very wise and would have guided him. Jim felt rudderless. He felt that it was incumbent on him to do the things that his father had not been able to do. Vaguely and childishly he determined that he must make good for the Mannings and for Exham. Poor old Exham, with its lost ideals!

It was in thinking this over that Jim conceived an idea that became a great comfort to him. He decided to write down all the advice that he could recall his father's giving him, and when his mother became less broken up, to ask her to tell him all the plans his father might have had for him.

So it was that a week or so after her husband's death, Mrs. Manning found one of Jim's scratch pads on the table in his room, with a carefully printed title on the cover:

MY FATHER'S ADVICES TO ME.

After she had wiped the quick tears from her eyes, she read the few pages Jim had completed in his sprawling hand:

"My father said to me, 'Jimmy, never make excuses. It's always too late for excuses.'

"He said, 'A liar is a first cousin to a skunk. There isn't a worse coward than a liar.'

"He said to me, 'Don't belly-ache. Stand up to your troubles like a man.'

"My father said, 'Hang to what you undertake like a hound to a warm scent.'

"He said to me, 'Life is made up of obeying. What you don't learn from me about that, the world will kick into you. The stars themselves obey a law. God must hate a law breaker.'

"My father said, 'Somehow us Americans are quitters.'

"My mother said my father said, 'I want Jimmy to go through college. I want him to marry young and have a big family.'

"The thing my father said to me oftenest lately was, 'Jimmy, be clean about women. Some day you will know what I mean when I say that sex is energy. Keep yourself clean for your life work and your wife and children.'"

Mrs. Manning read the pages over several times, then she laid the book down and stood staring out of the window.

"Oh, he was a good man!" she whispered. "He was a good man! If Jimmy could have had him just two years more! I don't know how to teach him the things a man ought to know. A boy needs his father.——Oh, my love! My love——"

Down below, Jim was leaning on the front gate. His chum, Phil Chadwick, was coming slowly up the street. The boys had not been near Jim since the funeral. Jim had become a person set apart from their boy world. No one appreciates the dignity of grief better than a boy, or underneath his awkwardness has a finer way of showing it. Phil's mother, to his unspeakable discomfort, had insisted now that he go call on Jim.

Phil, his round face red with embarrassment, approached the gate a little sidewise.

"Hello, Still!" he said casually.

"Hello, Pilly!" replied Jim, blushing in sympathy.

There was a pause, then said Phil, leaning on the gate, "Diana's got her pups. One's going to be a bulldog and two of 'em are setters. U-u-u—want to come over and see 'em and choose yours?"

Jim's face was quivering. It was his father who had persuaded his mother that Jim ought to have one of Diana's pups. Mrs. Manning felt toward dogs much as she might have toward hyenas.

"I—I—guess not today, Pilly!"

Another long pause during which the lads swung the gate to and fro and looked in opposite directions. A locust shrilled from the elm tree. Finally Phil said:

"Still, you gotta come up to the swimming hole. It'll do you good. He—he'd a wanted you to—to—to do what you could to cheer up. Come on, old skinny. Tell

your mother. We'll keep away from the other kids. Come on. You gotta do something or you'll go nutty in your head."

Jim turned and went into the house. His mother forestalled his request.

"If Phil wants you to go swimming, dear, go on. It will do you good. Don't stay in too long."

Jim and Phil walked up the road to the old Allen place. They climbed the stile into a field where the aftermath of the clover crop was richly green and vibrating with the song of cricket and katydid. The path that the boys followed had been used in turn by Indian and Puritan. The field still yielded an occasional hide scraper or stone axe.

There was a pine grove at the far edge of the field. In the center of the grove was the pond that had for centuries been the swimming pool for boys, Indian and white. Ground pine and "checkerberry" grew abundantly in the grove. Both boys breathed deep of the piney fragrance and filled their mouths with pungent "checkerberry" leaves. The path, deep worn by many bare feet, circled round the great pines to the clearing where the pond lay. It was black with the shadows of the grove where it was not blue and white in mirroring the September sky. Lily pads fringed the brim. Moss and a tender, long grass grew clear to the water's edge.

Several boys were undressing near the ancient springboard. They looked embarrassed and stopped their laughter when they saw Jim. He and Phil got into their swimming trunks quickly and followed each other in a clean dive into the pool. They swam about in silence for a time and then landed on the far side and lay in the sun on moss and pine needles.

The beauty and sweetness of the place were subtle balm to Jim. And surely if countless generations of boy joy could leave association, the old swimming hole should have spoken very sweetly to Jim. The swimming hole was a boy sanctuary. The water was too shallow for men. Little girls were not allowed to invade the grove except in early spring for trailing arbutus. The oldest men in Exham told that their grandfathers, as boys, had sought the swimming hole as the adult seeks his club.

Jim looked with interest at his legs. "I've got six. How many have you, Pilly?"

Phil counted the brown bloodsuckers that clung to his fat calves. "Seven. Mean

cusses, ain't they."

Jim worked with a sharp edged stone, scraping his thin shanks. "You've got fat to spare. They've had enough off of me today."

"I remember how crazy I was first time they got on me. Felt as if I had snakes." Phil rooted six of the suckers off his legs and paused at the seventh. "He's as skinny as you are, Still. I'll give him two minutes more to finish a square meal."

The two boys lay staring out at the pond.

"Have you gotta go to work, Still?" asked Phil.

"Yes," replied Jim. "Mother says I can't, though."

Phil waited more or less patiently. His mates had long since learned that Jim's silences were hard to break.

"But I'm going to get a job in the quarry as soon as I can keep from getting sick at my stomach every time I see a derrick."

"My dad says your—he—he always planned to send you through college," said Phil.

Jim nodded. "I'll get through college. See if I don't. But I won't let my mother support me. I've got a lot of things to finish up for him."

"What things?" asked Phil.

"Well," Jim hesitated for words, "he worried a lot because all the real Americans are dying off or going, somehow, and he always said it was us kids' business to find out why. That's the chief job."

"I don't see what you can do about it," said Phil. "That's a foolish thing to worry about. Why——"

A boy screamed on the opposite side of the pond. It was so different from the shouts and laughter of the moment before that Jim and Phil jumped to their feet. Across the swimming hole a naked boy was dancing up and down, screaming hysterically,

"Take 'em off! Take 'em off! Take 'em off!"

"It's the new minister's kid, Charlie," laughed Phil. "The fellows have got the

bloodsuckers on him. Ain't he the booby? Told me he was fifteen and he's bigger'n you are. Screams like a girl."

Jim stood staring, his hand shielding his gray eyes from the sun. Across the pond, the boys were doubled up with laughter, watching the minister's son writhe and tear at his naked body. Suddenly, Jim shot round the edge of the pond, followed by Phil. A dozen naked boys hopped joyfully around the twisting Charlie. They were of all ages, from eight to sixteen.

When Jim ran up to the new boy, his mates shouted: "Don't butt in, now, Jim. Don't butt in. He's a darned sissy."

Jim did not reply. Charlie was considerably larger than he. He had a finely muscled pink and white body, liberally dotted now with wriggling brown suckers. This was a familiar form of hazing with the Exham boys. There was a horror in a first experience with the little brown pests that usually resulted in a mild form of hysteria very pleasing to the young spectators. But Charlie was in an agony of loathing, far ahead of anything the boys had seen.

As Jim ran up, Charlie struck at him madly and the boys yelled in delight. Jim turned on them.

"Shut up!" he shouted. "Shut up *now*!"

Thin and tall, his boyish ribs showing, his damp hair tossed back from his beautiful gray eyes that were now black with anger, Jim dominated the crowd. There was immediate silence, broken only by Charlie's wild sobs.

"Take 'em off! Take 'em off!"

"He's going to have a fit!" exclaimed Phil.

Charlie's lips were blue and foam flecked. Again as Jim approached him, the minister's boy planted a blow on his ribs that made Jim spin.

"Charlie!" cried Jim. "*Shut up!*"

The same peculiarly commanding note that had silenced his mates pierced through Charlie's hysteria. He paused for a moment, and in that moment Jim said, "Hold your breath and they can't draw blood. I'll have 'em off you in a second."

"C-c-can't they?" sobbed Charlie.

"Hold your breath and I'll show you," said Jim. "Here, Phil, take hold."

As they stripped the squirming suckers, Jim kept a hand on Charlie's arm. "Can you fight, kid?" he asked. "You've got muscle. You'd better lick the fellow that started this on you or you'll never hear the end of it."

The blue receded from the older boy's lips. He had a fine, sensitive face. "I can fight," he replied. "But I fight fellows and not snakes or worms."

Jim nodded as he pulled off the last sucker. Then he turned to the boys, his hand still on Charlie's arm. He spoke in his usual drawl:

"They's a difference between hazing a fellow and torturing him. Some mighty gritty people can't stand snakes or suckers. You kids ought to use sense. Who started this?"

The biggest boy in the crowd, Fatty Allen, answered: "I did. And if your father hadn't just died I'd lick the stuffing out of you, Still, for butting in."

A shout of derision went up from the boys. Jim's lips tightened. "You lick the new kid first," he answered, "then tackle me. Get after him, Charlie!"

Charlie, quite himself again, leaped toward Fatty and the battle was on.

There had been, unknown to the boys, an interested spectator to this entire scene. Just as Charlie's screams had begun, a heavy set man, ruddy and well dressed, with iron gray hair and black lashed, blue eyes, had paused beside a pine tree. It was a vividly beautiful picture that he saw; the pine set pool, rush and pad fringed, and the naked boys, now gathered about the struggling two near the ancient springboard. One of the smaller boys, moving about to get a better view of the battle, came within arm reach of the stranger, who clutched him.

"Who's this boy they call Still?" he asked. "Stand up here on this stump. I'll brace you."

The small boy heaved a sigh of ecstasy at his unobstructed view. "It's Still Jim Manning. His father just got killed. He's boss of our gang."

"But he's not the biggest," said the stranger.

"Naw, he ain't the biggest, but he can make the fellows mind. He don't talk much but what he says goes."

"Can he lick the big fellow?"

"Who? Fatty Allen? Bet your life! Still's built like steel wire."

"What did he start this fight for?" asked the man.

"Aw, can't you see they'd never let up on this new kid after he bellered so, unless he licked Fatty? Gee! What a wallop! That Charlie kid is going to lick whey out of Fatty."

"So Still is boss?" mused the stranger. "Could he stop that fight, now?"

"Sure," answered the child, "but he wouldn't."

"We'll see," said the stranger. He crossed over to the ring of boys and touched Jim on the shoulder. "I want to speak to you, Manning."

Jim looked at the stranger in astonishment, then answered awkwardly, "Can you wait? I've got to referee this fight."

"You will have to come now," said the man. "Your mother said to come back at once, with me."

Jim walked into the ring, between the two combatants. "Drop it, fellows. I've got to go home. We'll finish this fight tomorrow. Fatty can tackle me then, too."

There were several protests but Fatty had had enough. He was glad of the opportunity to dive into the pond. One after the other the boys ran up the springboard until only Jim and the stranger were left. The man walked back into the grove and in a moment Jim, in his knickerbockers and blouse, joined him.

"I'm glad to see you can obey, as well as boss, me boy," said the man. "Your mother says you don't know that a few days ago she advertised in the N. Y. *Sun* for a position as housekeeper. I liked the ad and came up to see her. I'm a lawyer in New York, a widower. I like your mother. She's a lady to the center of her. But when she told me she had a boy your age, I felt dubious. She wanted to send for you but I insisted on coming meself. I wanted to see you among boys. Me name is Michael Dennis."

Jim flushed painfully. "I don't want my mother to work like that. I can support her."

"I'm glad that you feel that way, me boy. But on the other hand, you're not old

enough to support her the way she can support herself and you, too."

"I'll never let my mother support me!" cried Jim.

"What can you do to prevent it?" asked Mr. Dennis. "Wouldn't you like to live in New York?"

Jim hesitated. Dennis put his hand on Jim's shoulder. "I like you, me boy. I never thought to want another child about me house. Come, we'll talk it over with your mother."

Jim followed into the cottage sitting room, where his mother eyed the two anxiously.

"I thought something must have happened," she said. "Did you have trouble finding the pond?"

Mr. Dennis smiled genially. "Not a bit! I was just getting acquainted with your boy. He's quite a lad, Mrs. Manning, and I'm going to tell you I'll be glad to have him in me house. Now I'll just tell you what me house is like and what we'll have to expect of each other."

After an hour's talk Dennis said: "I will give you fifty dollars a month and board and lodging for the lad."

Mrs. Manning flushed with relief. Jim, who had not said a word since coming into the house, spoke suddenly in his father's own drawl:

"I don't want anyone to give me my keep. I'll take care of the furnace and do the work round the house you pay a man to do, and if that isn't enough to pay for keeping me, I'll work for you in your office Saturdays."

Mr. Dennis looked at the tall boy keenly, then said whimsically, "Well, I thought you'd been smitten dumb."

"He's very still, Jim is, except when he's fearfully worked up. All the Mannings are that way," said his mother.

Mr. Dennis nodded. "The house takes lots of care. Your mother will get a maid to help her and I'll let the man go who has been doing janitor service for me. With this arrangement, I'll make your mother's salary $65 a month."

And so the decision was made.

It was the last week in September when Jim and his mother left Exham. The day before they left the old town, Jim tramped doggedly up the street toward the old Manning mansion. He had not been there since his father's death.

When he reached the dooryard he stopped, pulled off his cap and stood looking at the doorway that had welcomed so many Mannings and sped so many more. The boy stood, erect and slender, the wind ruffling his thick dark hair across his dreamer's forehead, his energetic jaw set firmly. Now and again tears blinded his gray eyes, but he blinked them back resolutely.

Jim must have stood before the door of his old home for half an hour, a silent, lonely young figure at whom the quarry men glanced curiously. When the whistle blew five Jim made an heroic effort and turned and looked at the derrick, again spliced into place. He shuddered but forced himself to look.

It was after sunset when Jim finally turned away. It was many years before he came to this place again. Yet Exham had made its indelible imprint on the boy. The convictions that had molded his first fourteen years were to mold his whole life. Somehow he felt that his father had been a futile sacrifice to the thing that was destroying New England and that old New England spirit which he had been taught to revere. What the thing was he did not know. And yet, with his boyish lips trembling, he promised the old mansion to make good for his father and for Exham—poor old Exham, with its lost ideals!

CHAPTER III

THE BROWNSTONE FRONT

"Coyote, eagle, Indian, I have seen countless generations of them fulfill their destinies and disappear. I wonder when my turn will come."

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

Jim and his mother did not feel like strangers when they reached New York. Mrs. Manning knew the city well and Jim, boy-like, was overjoyed at the idea of being in the great town.

Mr. Dennis' brownstone front was one of the fine old houses on West 23rd street that are fast making way for stores. It was full of red Brussels carpets and walnut furniture of crinkly design. It had crayon enlargements of Mrs. Dennis and the two small Dennises in the parlor and in the guest room and in Mr. Dennis' room. Jim wondered how Mr. Dennis could be so genial when he had lost so much.

The third floor had two large rooms opening off a big central room, and this floor, comfortably furnished, was for the use of Mrs. Manning and Jim and the maid. Mrs. Manning solved the maid question by sending back to Exham for Annie Peyton. Annie was about forty. Her mother had been housekeeper for Mrs. Manning's mother and Annie was the domestic day worker for the village. Up in Exham English customs still obtained among the old families. Annie was "Peyton" to Mrs. Manning.

Jim guessed from his own feelings how her position as a servant hurt his mother. She herself never said anything, but Jim noticed that she made no friends. Mr. Dennis treated her with a very real courtesy and basked in her perfect housekeeping.

Jim entered school at once. In his own way, he was a brilliant student. He had the sort of mind that instinctively grasps fundamental principles, and this faculty, combined with a certain mental obstinacy and independence, made him at once the pride and terror of his teachers. He was a very firm rock on which to depend for exhibition purposes, but whenever he asked questions they were of a searching variety that made his teachers long to box his ears.

It was rather a pity that all Jim's spare moments when not in school had to be spent in janitor service. He missed the companionship of the boys in the public school which, in America, is an almost indispensable part of a boy's education. In his adult life he must meet and understand men and methods of every nationality. New York public schools are veritable congresses of nations and a

boy who plans to go into business gets far more than mere book learning from them. Jim's poverty cut him out of athletics and clubs so that all his inherent New England tendency to mental aloofness would have been vastly increased if it had not been for his summer vacations.

The first day of his summer vacation, Jim applied for a job. A steel skyscraper was being erected in 42nd street and Jim asked the superintendent of construction for work. The superintendent looked at the lank lad, who now, fifteen, would have appeared eighteen were it not for his smooth, almost childish face.

"What kind of work, young fella?" asked the Boss.

"Anything to start with," replied Jim, "until we see what I can do."

"You're as thin as a lath. Ye can get down there with Derrick No. 2 and get some muscle laid on you. A dollar fifty a day is the best I can do for you. Get along now."

Jim's brain reeled with joy at the size of his prospective income. He nodded, pulled off his coat, leaving it in the superintendent's office and found his way to Derrick No. 2.

The structure was a big one, so big that the exigencies of New York traffic were forcing the company to build in sections. A steel frame nearly eighteen stories high was nearly finished at one edge, while blasting for another portion of the foundation, five stories deep, was going on at the other edge.

Derrick No. 2 was in the new foundation. Jim's foreman was a Greek. His companion, with whom he guided the rock that the derrick lifted was a Sicilian. The steam drillman whom Jim had to help was a negro. There were ten nationalities on the pay roll of the company. Jim had grown accustomed to feeling in school that New York was not in America, but in a foreign country. Down in the five-story hole in the ground, with the ear-shattering batter of the steam riveters above him, the groaning of the donkey engines, the tear and screech of the steam drills beside him, with the never ending clatter and chatter of tongues that he could not understand about him, Jim often got the sense of suffocation of which his father had complained. He detested foreigners, anyhow. There was in Jim the race vanity of the Anglo-Saxon which is as profound as it is unconscious.

Now, with his boyish sweat mingling with that of these alien workers on the great new structure, Jim wondered how he was going to stand this, summer after summer, until he had his education. They seemed to him so dirty, so stupid, like so many chattering monkeys. To get to know them, to try to understand them, never occurred to him.

Jim liked the darky, Hank, better than he did the others. To Hank the others were foreigners as they were to Jim.

"Don't talk so much. I can't hear ma drill!" yelled Hank in Jim's ear one afternoon when the din was at its height.

Jim flashed his charming smile. "I talk English, anyhow," he shouted back, "when I do talk."

"You'se the stillest white man I ever see. I'se callin' you Still Jim in my mind. Pretty quick whites and colored folks can't get no jobs no more in this country. Just Bohunks and Wops and Ginnies. Can you watch the drill one minute while I gits a drink?"

Jim nodded and glanced up at the red spider web that was dotted clear to the eighteenth floor with black dots of workmen. He looked up at the street edge of the gray pit. Black heads peered over the rail, staring idly at the workmen below. Jim felt half a thrill of pride that he was a part of the great work at which they gazed, half a hot sense of resentment that they stared so stupidly at his discomfort.

Far above gray stone and red ironwork was the deep blue of the summer sky. Jim wondered if the kids in the old swimming hole missed him. He wished he could lie on his back and talk to Phil Chadwick again. As he stared wistfully upward, a girder on the 18th floor twisted suddenly and swept across a temporary floor, brushing men off like crumbs. Jim saw three men go hurtling and bounding down, down to the street. He could not hear them scream above the din. He felt sick at his stomach and lifted his hand from the drill, expecting the steam to be shut off. But it was not.

Hank came back, the whites of his eyes showing a little. "Killed three. All Wops," he said. "Morgue gets a man a day outa this place. They just sticks 'em outside the board fence and a policeman sends fer a ambulance. The blood on these here New York buildings sure oughta hoo-doo 'em. There, you Still Jim, you get a drink o' water. You look white. The iron workers quit fer the day. They

always does when a man gits killed."

That evening Jim did an errand to the tobacco shop for Mr. Dennis. On his return to the library with the cigars, Dennis looked at the boy affectionately. Jim interested him. His faithfulness to his mother, his quiet ways, his unboyish life, touched the Irishman.

"You look a little peaked round the gills, Still Jim. Better cut this work you're doing and come to me office. I can't pay you so much but I'll make a lawyer of you."

Jim shook his head. "The work is good for me. The gym teacher said I was growing too fast and to stay outdoors all summer."

"What's the matter with you, then?" insisted Dennis.

"I saw three men killed just before quitting time," said the boy. Then suddenly his face flushed. "Sometimes I hate it here in New York. Seems as if I can't stand it. They don't care anything about human beings. I can't think of New York as anything but a can full of angle worms, all of them crawling over each other to get to the top."

"Sit down, me boy," said Dennis. "If little Mike had lived, he'd have been just your age, Still Jim. I don't like to think of you as having so little of a boy's life. Jim, take the summer off and I'll take you to the seashore."

Jim smiled a little uncertainly. "I can't leave mama, and the money I'll get this summer will buy my clothes for a year and something for me to put in the bank. I'm all right. It's just that since—since you know I saw Dad——" and to his utter shame Jim began to sob. He dropped his head on his arm and Dennis' florid face became more deeply red as he looked at the long thin body and the beautiful brown head shaken by sobs.

"Good God, Jimmy, don't!" he exclaimed. "Why, you're all shot to pieces, lad. Hold on now, I'll tell you a funny story. No, I won't either. I'll tell you something to take up your mind. Still, do you think your mother would marry me?"

This had the desired effect. Jim jumped to his feet, forgetting even to wipe the tears from his cheeks.

"She certainly would not!" he cried. "I wouldn't let her. Has she said she would?"

"I haven't asked her," replied Mr. Dennis meekly. "I wanted to talk to you about it first. Much as I think of her, Jim, I wouldn't marry her if you objected. You've been through too much for a kid."

Jim eyed Mr. Dennis intently. The Irishman was a pleasant, intelligent-looking man.

"I like you now," said the boy, his voice catching from his heavy sobbing, "but I'd hate you if you tried to take my father's place. Anyway, I don't think mama would even listen to you. What makes you want to get married again, Mr. Dennis, after—after that?"

Jim looked toward the crayon enlargement above the mantel.

Dennis answered quickly. "Don't think for a minute I'd try to put anyone in her place." He nodded toward the sweet-faced woman who was looking down at them. "And I wouldn't expect to take your father's place. I guess your mother and I both know we gave and got the best in life, once, and it only comes once. Only it's this way, Still Jim, me boy. When people pass middle age and look forward to old age, they see it lonely, desperately lonely, and they want company to help them go through it. I admire and respect your mother and I think as much of you as if you were me own. But you'll be going off soon to make your own way. Then your mother and I could look out for each other. I leave the decision to you, me boy."

"I can't stand thinking of anybody in my father's place," repeated Jim huskily. "I'm—I'm going out for a walk." And he rushed out of the house and started north toward 42nd street, his mind a blur of protest.

The same instinct that sends the workman back to look at the shop on his Sunday afternoon stroll, urged Jim up to the new skyscraper. The night watchman was for driving the lank boy away until Jim explained that he worked in the foundation, and was just back to see how it looked at night.

"If you want to see a grand sight," said the old man, "get you up to the top floor and look out at the city. Take the tile elevator at the back. Tell the man Morrissy sent ye."

The work in the foundation was going on but not on the steel structure. No one heeded Jim. He reached the 18th floor, where there was a narrow temporary flooring. Jim sat down on a coil of rope. The boy was badly shaken.

No one, unless for the first time tonight, Mr. Dennis, realized how hard a nerve shock Jim had had in seeing his father killed. He had kept from his mother the horror of the nights that followed the tragedy. She did not know that periodically, even now, he dreamed the August fields and the dying men and the bloody derrick over again. She did not know what utter courage it had taken to join the derrick gang, not for fear for his own safety, but because of the dread association in his own mind.

At first, the sense of height made Jim quiver. To master this he fixed his mind on the details of structure underneath. Line on line the delicate tracery of steel waiting for its concrete sheathing was silhouetted below him. The night wind rushed past and he braced himself automatically, noting at the same time how the vibration of the steel cobweb was like a marvelous faint tune. The wonder of conception and workmanship caught the boy's imagination.

"That's what I'll do," he said aloud. "I'll build steel buildings like this. In college, that's what I'll study, reinforced concrete building. I've got to find a profession that'll give me a bigger chance than poor Dad had, so I can marry young and have lots and gob-lots of kids."

The wind increased and Jim slid off the coil of rope and lay flat on his back, looking up at the sky. It was full of stars and scudding clouds. Jim missed the sky in New York. He lay staring, sailing with the clouds while his boyish heart glowed with the stars.

"I'm not in New York," he thought. "I'm—I'm out in the desert country. There isn't any noise. There aren't any people. I'm an engineer and I'm building a bridge across a canyon where no one but the birds have ever crossed before. I'm making a place for people to come after me. I'm discovering new land for them and fixing it so they can come."

For half an hour Jim lay and dreamed. He often had wondered what he was going to be as a man. He had planned to be many things, from a milkman to an Indian fighter. But since his father's death and indeed for some time before, his mind had taken a bent suggested by Mr. Manning's melancholy. What was the matter with Exham and the Mannings? Why had his father failed? What could he do to make up for the failure? These thoughts had colored the boy's dreams. No one can measure the importance to a child of taking his air castles away from him. Tragedy scars a child permanently. Grown people often forget a heavy loss.

But tonight, inspired by the wonder of the building and the heavens, Jim's mind

slipped its leashings and took its racial bent. Suddenly he was a maker of trails, a builder in the wilderness. He completed the bridge and then sat up with an articulate, "Gee whiz! I know what I'm going to be!"

It seemed a matter of tremendous importance to the boy. He sat with clenched fists and burning cheeks, sensing for the first time one of the highest types of joy that comes to human beings, that of finding one's predilection in the work by which one earns one's daily bread. The sense of clean-cut aim to his life was like balm and tonic to the boy's nerves. Something deeper than a New York or a New England influence was speaking in Jim now. For the first time, his Anglo-Saxon race, his race of empire builders, was finding its voice in him.

Jim rode gaily down the tile elevator, his flashing smile getting a vivid response from the Armenian elevator boy. He ran a good part of the way home and burst into the house with a slam, utterly unlike his usual quiet, unboyish steadiness. He was dashing past the library door on his way upstairs to his mother, when he caught a glimpse of her sitting near the library table with Mr. Dennis. He forgot to be astonished at her unwonted presence there. He ran into the room.

"Mama!" he cried. "Mama! I'm going to be an engineer and go out west and build railroads and bridges out where its wild! Aren't you glad?"

Mr. Dennis and Mrs. Manning stared in astonishment at Jim's loquacity and at the glow of his face. His gray eyes were brilliant. His thick hair was wind-tossed across his forehead. Mr. Dennis, being Irish, understood. He rose, shook hands with Jim, his left hand patting the boy's shoulder.

"You're made for it, Still Jim, me boy," he said, soberly. "You've the engineer's mind. How'd you come to think of it?"

"Up on top of the skyscraper," replied Jim lucidly. "Don't you see, Mama? Isn't it great?"

Mrs. Manning was trying to smile, but her lips trembled. She was wishing Jim's father could see him now. "I don't understand, Jimmy. But if you like it, I must. But what shall I do with you out west?"

Jim gasped, whitened, then looked at Mr. Dennis and began to turn red.

CHAPTER IV

JIM FINDS SARA AND PEN

"Since time began Indians have climbed my back and have cried their joys and sorrows to the sky. I wonder who has heard!"

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

Mr. Dennis laughed. He still was holding Jim's hand "May I ask her?" he said to Jim.

Jim nodded, though his eyes were startled. Suddenly Mr. Dennis dropped Jim's hand and threw his arm across the boy's shoulders. The two stood facing Mrs. Manning.

"Mrs. Manning," began the Irishman, "I think you feel that I admire and respect you. I am a lonely man. I asked Jim if I could ask you to marry me, earlier in the evening. He said, No! No one should take his father's place. I told him you and I had lived through too much to dream of falling in love again, but that old age was a lonely thing. I need you and when Jim finishes school and goes, you'll need me, Mrs. Manning. I can send Jim through college and give him a right start. Will you marry me, say in a day or two, without any fuss, Mrs. Manning?"

The little widow's face was flushed. "What made you change, Jim?" she exclaimed. "I couldn't love anyone but your father."

Jim nodded. "I didn't realize then that my work would take me away from you. You know a man's job is very important, Mama. I want to get someone to take care of you while I build bridges, for I've *got to build them*. I can send you money but I want a man to be looking out for you."

Mr. Dennis' eyes twinkled but he waited.

"It's only a year since your father died. I never could care for anyone else," said Mrs. Manning.

"It's ten years since Mrs. Dennis and the babies died," said Dennis. "I never could love anyone as I did the three of them. But you and I suit each other

comfortably, Mrs. Manning. We'd be a great comfort to each other and we can do some good things for Still Jim. You must try to give him his chance. It's a sad boyhood he's having, Mrs. Manning. Let's give him the chance he can't have unless you marry me."

Mrs. Manning looked at Jim. His face still was eager but there were dark rings around his eyes that came from nerve strain. He was too thin and she saw for the first time that his shoulders were rounding. Mr. Dennis followed up his advantage.

"Look at his hands, Mrs. Manning. Hard work has knocked them up too much for his age. He should have his chance to play if he's to do good body and brain work later. Let's give his father's son a chance! Don't you think his father would approve?"

"Oh, but I'm going to keep on working and supporting myself!" cried Jim. "I just wanted you to look out for Mama."

"Well, I guess not!" cried Mrs. Manning, vehemently. "You'll come straight out of that foundation tomorrow. You are going to have your chance. Oh, Jim dear! I hadn't realized how little happiness you've been having!"

Jim shook his head. "I can support myself."

Mrs. Manning sniffed. "How can you be a good engineer out in that awful rough country unless you have the best kind of a physical foundation? Use sense, Jimmy."

This was a master stroke. Jim wavered, then caught his left ankle in his hand and hopped about like a happy frog.

"Gee whiz!" he cried. "I'll enter the try-out squad the first thing. I bet I can make school quarter back."

Mr. Dennis cut in neatly. "It might just as well take place tomorrow and the three of us can take a month at the seashore. I'll bet Jim has sighed for the old swimming hole lately."

The little widow looked at Mr. Dennis long and keenly, then she rose and held out her hand while she said very deliberately:

"You are a good man, Michael Dennis. I thank you for me and mine and I'll be a

comfort to you as you are being to me. I'm not going to pretend I'd do this if it wasn't for Jim. I can't love you, but you love Jim and that's enough for me."

And so Jim was given his chance.

He spent the rest of the summer at the shore and entered school in the fall with a new interest. With the unexpected lift of the money burden from his shoulders, Jim began to make up for his lost play. Football and track work, debating societies and glee-clubs straightened his round shoulders and found him friends. Most important of all, he ceased to brood for a time over his Exham problems.

Jim's stepfather, whom the boy called Uncle Denny, took a pride and interest in the boy that sometimes brought the tears to his mother's eyes. It seemed to her that the warm-hearted Irishman gave to Jim all the love that the death of his family had left unsatisfied. And Jim, in his undemonstrative way, returned Mr. Dennis' affection. He shared with his Uncle Denny his growing ideals on engineering. He rehearsed his debating society speeches on his Uncle Denny, who endured them with enthusiasm. He and his Uncle Denny worked out some marvelous football tactics when Jim as a senior in the high school became captain of the school team. Often of an evening Jim's mother would come upon the two in the library, flat on their backs before the grate in a companionship that needed and found no words.

At such times she would say, "Michael, you didn't marry me. You married Jim."

And Dennis would look up at her with a smile of understanding that she returned.

When Jim was a freshman in Columbia, he acquired a chum. It was not a chum who took the place of Phil Chadwick. Nothing in after life ever fills the hollow left by the first friendship of childhood and Phil was hallowed in Jim's memory along with all the beauties of the swimming hole and the quiet elms around the old Exham mansions.

But Jim's new chum gave him his first opportunity at hero-worship, which is an essential step in a boy's growth. The young man's name was George Saradokis. His mates called him Sara. His mother was a Franco-American, his father was a Greek, a real estate man in the Greek section of New York. Sara confided to Jim, early in their acquaintance, that his father was the disinherited son of a nobleman and that he, the grandson, would be his grandfather's heir. The glamour of this possible inheritance did not detract at all from the romance of the new friendship

in Jim's credulous young eyes.

Sara was halfback on the freshman football team, while Jim played quarterback. The two were of a height, six feet, but Jim still was slender. Sara was broad and heavy. He was very Greek—that is, modern Greek, which has little racially or temperamentally in common with the ancient Greek. He was a brilliant student, yet of a commerciality of mind that equalled that of any Jewish student in the class.

Both the boys were good trackmen. Both were good students. Both were planning to be engineers. But, temperamentally, they were as far apart as the two countries whence came their father's stock.

Uncle Denny did not approve fully of Saradokis, but finally he decided that it was good for Jim to overcome some of his New England prejudice against the immigrant class and he encouraged the young Greek to come to the house.

It was when Jim was a freshman, too, that Penelope came from Colorado to live with her Uncle Denny. Her father, Uncle Denny's brother, had married a little Scotch girl and they had made a bare living from a small mine, up in the mountains, until a fatal attack of pneumonia claimed them both in a single month. Penelope stayed on at a girl's school in Denver for a year. Then, Jim's mother urging it, Mr. Dennis sent for her. Jim, absorbed in the intricate business of being a freshman, did not give much heed to the preparations for her coming.

One spring evening he sauntered into the library to wait for the dinner bell. As he strolled over to the fireplace, he saw a slender young girl sitting in the Morris chair.

"Oh, hello!" said Jim.

"Hello!" said the young girl, rising.

The two calmly eyed each other. Jim saw a graceful girl, three or four years younger than himself, with a great braid of chestnut hair hanging over one shoulder. She had a round face that ended in a pointed chin, a generous mouth, a straight little nose and a rich glow of color in her cheeks. These details Jim noted only casually, for his attention was focused almost immediately on her eyes. For years after, whenever Jim thought of Penelope, he thought of a halo of chestnut hair about eyes of a deep hazel; eyes that were large, almost too large, for the little round face; eyes that were steady and clear and black sometimes with

feeling or with a fleeting shadow of melancholy that did not belong to her happy youth.

Penelope saw a tall lad in a carefully dressed Norfolk suit. He had a long, thin, tanned face, with a thick mop of soft hair falling across his forehead, a clear gaze and a flashing, wistful, fascinatingly sweet smile as he repeated:

"Hello, Penelope!"

"Hello, Still Jim!" replied the girl, while her round cheeks showed dimples that for a moment made Jim forget her eyes.

"Uncle Denny's been busy, I see," said Jim.

Then he was speechless. He had not reached the "girl stage" as yet. Penelope was not disturbed. She continued to look Jim over, almost unblinkingly. Then Jim, to his own astonishment, suddenly found his tongue.

"I'm glad you've come," he said abruptly. "I'm going to think a lot of you, I can see that."

He held out his hand and Penelope slipped her slender fingers into his hard young fists. Jim did not let the little hand go for a minute. The two looked at each other clearly.

"I'm glad I'm here," said Penelope. Then she dimpled. "And I'm glad you're nice, because Uncle Denny told me that if I didn't like you I'd show myself no judge of boys. When I giggled, I know he wanted to slap me."

Jim's smile flashed and Penelope wondered what she liked best about it, his white teeth, his merriness or his wistfulness.

"There's the dinner bell!" exclaimed Jim. "As Uncle Denny says, I'm so hungry me soul is hanging by a string. Come on, Penelope."

Penelope entered Jim's life as simply and as easily as Saradokis did.

Sara charmed both Jim and Penelope. His physical beauty alone was a thing to fascinate far harsher critics than these two who grew to be his special friends. His hair was tawny and thick and wavy. His eyes were black and bright. His mouth was small and perfectly cut. His cleft chin was square and so was his powerful jaw. He carried himself like an Indian and his strength was like that of the lover in Solomon's song.

Added to this was the romance of his grandfather. This story enthralled little Pen, who at fourteen was almost bowled over by the thought that some day Sara might be a duke.

Sara's keen mind, his commercial cleverness had a strong hold on Jim, who lacked the money-making instinct. Jim quoted Sara a good deal at first to Uncle Denny, whose usual comment was a grunt.

"Sara says it's a commercial age. If you don't get out and rustle money you might as well get off the earth."

A grunt from Uncle Denny.

"Well, but Uncle Denny, you can't deny he's right."

The Irishman's reply was indirect. "Remember, me boy, that the chief value of a college education is to set your standards, to make your ideals. These four years are the high-water mark of your life's idealism. You never'll get higher. Anything else you are taught in college you'll have to learn over another way after you get out to buck real life."

Jim thought this over for a time, then he said: "Do you ever talk to Pen like you do to me? It would do her good."

Uncle Denny sniffed. "Don't you worry about Pen's ideas. She's got the best mind I ever found in a girl. When she gets past the giggling age, you'll learn a few things from her, me boy."

Penelope chummed with the two boys impartially as far as Dennis or Jim's mother could perceive. The girl with her common sense and her foolishness and her youthfulness was an inexpressible joy to Jim's mother, who always had longed for a daughter. She had dreams about Jim and Pen that she confided to no one and she looked on Penelope's impartiality with a jealous eye.

Until Pen was sixteen the boys were content to share her equally. They were finishing their junior year when Pen's sixteenth birthday arrived. It fell on a Saturday, and Jim and Sara cut Saturday morning classes and invited Penelope to a day at Coney Island. Uncle Denny and Jim's mother were to meet the trio for supper and return with them.

It was a June morning fit to commemorate, Sara said, even Pen's birthday. The three, carrying their bathing suits, caught the 8 o'clock boat at 129th street,

prepared to do the weather and the occasion full justice. The crowd was not great on this early boat until the Battery was reached. Then all the world rushed up the gang plank; Jew and Gentile crowded for the best places. Italian women, with babies, dragged after husbands with lunch baskets. Stout Irish matrons looked with scorn on the "foreigners" and did great devastation in claiming camp stools. Very young Jewish girls and boys were the most conspicuous element in the crowd, but there were groups of gentle Armenians, of Syrians, of Chinese and parties of tourists with field glasses and cameras.

"And every one of them claims to be an American," said Jim.

Penelope nudged Sara. "Look at Jim's New England nose," she chuckled. "I don't see how he can see anything but the sky."

Jim did not heed Pen's remarks. Pen and Sara laughed. They were thrilled by the very cosmopolitan aspect of the crowd. They responded to a sense of world citizenship to which Jim was an utter alien.

"Make 'em a speech, Jim!" cried Sara, as the boat got under way again. "Make the eagle scream. It's a bully place for a speech. The poor devils can't get away from you."

Jim grinned. Pen, her eyes twinkling, joined in with Sara. "He's too lazy. He's a typical American. He'll roast the immigrants but he won't do anything. It's a dare, Jim."

Sara shouted, "It's a dare, Still! Go to it! Pen and I dare you to make the boat a speech."

Jim was still smiling but his eyes narrowed. The old boyhood code still held in college. The "taker" of a dare was no sportsman. And there was something deeper than this that suddenly spoke; the desire of his race to force his ideas on others, the same desire that had made his father talk to the men in the quarry at Exham. With a sudden swing of his long legs he mounted a pile of camp chairs and balanced himself with a hand on Sara's shoulder.

"Shut up!" he shouted. "Everybody shut up and listen to me!"

It was the old dominating note. Those of the crowd that heard his voice turned to look. It was a vivid group they saw; the tall boy, with thin, eager face, fine gray eyes and a flashing wistful smile that caught the heart, and with a steadying arm thrown round Jim's thighs, the Greek lad, with his uncovered hair liquid gold in

the June sun, his beautiful brown face flushed and laughing, while crowded close to Sara was the pink-cheeked girl, her face upturned to look at Jim.

"Hey! Everybody! Keep still and listen to me!" repeated Jim.

In the hush that came, the chatter in the cabin below and the rear deck sounded remote.

"I've been appointed a committee of one to welcome you to America!" cried Jim. "Welcome to our land. And when you get tired of New York, remember that it's not in America. America lies beyond the Hudson. Enjoy yourselves. Take everything that isn't nailed down."

"Who gave the country to you, kid?" asked a voice in the crowd.

"My ancestors who, three hundred years ago, stole it from the Indians," answered Jim with a smile.

A roar of laughter greeted this. "How'd you manage to keep it so long?" asked someone else.

"Because you folks hadn't heard of it," replied the boy.

Another roar of laughter and someone else called, "Good speech. Take up a collection for the young fellow to get his hair cut with."

Jim tossed the hair out of his eyes and gravely pointed back to the marvelous outline of the statue of Liberty, black against the sky. "Take a collection and drink hope to that, my friends. It is the most magnificent experiment in the world's history, and you have taken it out of our hands."

There was a sudden hush, followed by hand clapping, during which Jim slipped down. Sara gave him a bear hug. "Oh, Still Jim, you're the light of my weary eyes! Did he call our bluff, Pen, huh?"

There was something more than laughter in Pen's eyes as she replied:

"I'm never sure whether Still was cut out to be an auctioneer or a politician."

"Gosh!" exclaimed Jim, "let's get some ginger ale."

The day rushed on as if in a wild endeavor to keep up with the June wind which beat up and down the ocean and across Coney Island, urging the trio on to its maddest. They shot the chutes until, maudlin with laughter, they took to a merry-

go-round. When they were ill from whirling, Sara led the way to the bucking staircase. This was a style of several steps arranged to buck at unexpected intervals. The movement so befuddled the climber that he consistently took a step backward for every step forward until at last, goaded by the huge laughter of the watching crowd, he fairly fell to the opposite side of the staircase.

It was before this seductive phenomenon that the three paused. The crowd was breathlessly watching the struggles of a very fat, very red-headed woman who chewed gum in exact rhythm with the bucking of the staircase, while she firmly marked time on the top of the stairs.

Sara gave a chuckle and, closely followed by Jim and Pen, he mounted the stile. He was balked by the red-headed woman who towered high above him. Sara reached up and touched her broad back.

"Walk right ahead, madam," he urged. "You're holding us back."

The fat woman obediently took a wild step forward, the stair bucked and she stepped firmly backward and sat down violently on Sara's head. Pen and Jim roared with the crowd. The red-headed woman scrambled to the topmost stair again, then turned and shook her fist in Sara's face.

"Don't you touch me again, you brute!" she screamed. Then she summoned all her energies and took another dignified step upward. Again the stairs bucked. Again the fat woman sat down on Sara's hat. Again the onlookers were overwhelmed with laughter. Pen and Jim feebly supported each other as they rode up and down on the lower step. Sara pushed the woman off his head and again she turned on him.

"There! You made me swallow my gum! And I'll bet you call yourself a gentleman!"

Sara, red-faced but grinning, took a mighty step upward, gripped the woman firmly around the waist and lifted her down the opposite side of the stile. Pen and Jim followed with a mad scramble. For a moment it looked as if the red-headed woman would murder Sara. But as she looked at his young beauty her middle-aged face was etched by a gold-toothed smile.

"Gee, that's more fun than I've had for a year!" she exclaimed and she melted into helpless laughter.

Coney Island is of no value to the fastidious or the lazy. Coney Island belongs to

those who have the invaluable gift of knowing how to be foolish, who have felt the soul-purging quality of huge laughter, the revivifying power of play. Lawyers and pickpockets, speculators and laborers, poets and butchers, chorus girls and housewives at Coney Island find one common level in laughter. Every wholesome human being loves the clown.

Spent with laughing, Pen finally suggested lunch, and Jim led the way to an open-air restaurant.

"Let's," he said with an air of inspiration, "eat lunch backward. Begin with coffee and cheese and ice cream and pie and end with clam chowder and pickles."

"Nothing could be more perfect!" exclaimed Pen enthusiastically, and as nothing surprises a Coney Islander waiter, they reversed the menu.

When they could hold no more, they strolled down to the beach and sat in the sand. The crowd was very thick here. Nearly everyone was in a bathing suit. Women lolled, half-naked in the sand, while their escorts, still more scantily clad, sifted sand over them. Unabashed couples embraced each other, rubbing elbows with other embracing pairs. The wind blew the smell of hot, wet humans across Jim's face. He looked at Pen's sweet face, now a little round-eyed and abashed in watching the unashamed crowd. It was the first time that Mrs. Manning had allowed Pen to go to Coney Island without her careful eye.

Jim said, with a slow red coming into his cheeks, "Let's get out of here, Sara."

"Why, we just got here," replied Sara. "Let's get into our suits and have some fun."

"Pen'll not get into a bathing suit with these muckers," answered Jim, slowly.

Pen, who had been thinking the same thing, immediately resented Jim's tone. "Of course I shall," she replied airily. "You can't boss me, Jim."

"That's right, Pen," agreed Sara. "Let old Prunes sit here and swelter. You and I will have a dip."

Pen rose and she and Sara started toward the bath house. Jim took a long stride round in front of the two.

"Sara, do as you please," he drawled. "Penelope will stay here with me."

CHAPTER V

THE SIGN AND SEAL

"The river forever flows yet she sees no farther than I who am forever silent, forever still."

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

"Jim Manning, you've no right to speak to me that way," said Penelope.

Jim returned her look clearly. "You are to stay here, Pen," he repeated slowly.

"You've got your nerve, Still!" exclaimed Sara. "Pen's as much my company as she is yours. Quit trying to start something. Pen, come along."

Jim did not stir for a moment, then he jerked his head toward the bath house. "Go ahead and get into your suit, Sara. Penelope and I will wait here for you."

Sara had seen Jim in this guise before, on the football field. For a moment he scowled, then he shrugged his shoulders. "You old mule!" he grunted. "All right, Pen. You pacify the brute and I'll be back in a few minutes."

Pen did not yield so gracefully. She sat down in the sand with her back half turned to Jim and he, with his boyish jaw set, eyed her uncomfortably. She did not speak to him until Sara appeared and, with an airy wave of the hand, waded into the water.

"I think Sara looks like a Greek god in a bathing suit," she said. "You'd know he was going to be a duke, just to look at him."

Jim gave a good imitation of one of Uncle Denny's grunts and said: "He isn't a duke—yet—and he's gone in too soon after eating."

"And he's got beautiful manners," Pen continued. "You treat me as if I were a child. He never forgets that I am a lady."

"Oh, slush!" drawled Jim.

Pen turned her back, squarely. Sara did not remain long in the water but came up

dripping and shivering to burrow in the hot sand. Pen deliberately sifted sand over him, patting it down as she saw the others do, while she told Sara how wonderfully he swam.

Sara eyed Jim mischievously, while he answered: "Never mind, Pen. When I'm the duke, you shall be the duchess and have a marble swimming pool all of your own. And old Prunes will be over here coaching Anthony Comstock while you and I are doing Europe—in our bathing suits."

Penelope flushed quickly and Sara's halo of romance shone brighter than ever.

"The Duchess Pen," he went on largely. "Not half bad. For my part, I can't see any objection to a girl as pretty as you are wearing a bathing suit anywhere, any time."

Pen looked at Sara adoringly. At sixteen one loves the gods easily. Jim, with averted face, watched the waves dumbly. It had been easy that morning to toss speech back and forth with the boat crowd. But now, as always, when he felt that his need for words was dire, speech deserted him. Suddenly he was realizing that Pen was no longer a little girl and that she admired Saradokis ardently. When the young Greek strolled away to dress, Jim looked at Pen intently. She was so lovely, so rosy, so mischievous, so light and sweet as only sixteen can be.

"Cross patch. Draw the latch! Sit by the sea and grouch," she sang.

Jim flushed. "I'm not grouchy," he protested.

"Oh, yes you are!" cried Pen. "And when Sara comes back, he and I are going up for some ice cream while you stay here and get over it. You can meet us for supper with Aunt Mary and Uncle Denny."

Jim, after the two had left, sat for a long time in the sand. He wished that he could have a look at the old swimming hole up at Exham. He wished that he and Uncle Denny and his mother and Pen were living at Exham. For the first time he felt a vague distrust of Sara. After a time he got into his bathing suit and spent the rest of the afternoon in and out of the water, dressing only in time to meet the rest for supper.

After supper the whole party went to one of the great dancing pavilions. Uncle Denny and Jim's mother danced old-fashioned waltzes, while Sara and Jim took turn about whirling Penelope through two steps and galloping through modern waltz steps. The music and something in Jim's face touched Pen. As he piloted

her silently over the great floor in their first waltz, she looked up into his face and said:

"I was horrid, Still Jim. You were so bossy. But you were right; it was no place for me."

Jim's arm tightened round her soft waist. "Pen," he said, "promise me you'll shake Sara and the rest and walk home from the boat with me tonight."

Pen hesitated. She would rather have walked home with Sara, but she was very contrite over Jim's lonely afternoon, so she promised. Sara left the boat at the Battery to get a subway train home. When the others reached 23rd street, it was not difficult for Jim and Pen to drop well behind Uncle Denny and Jim's mother. Jim drew Pen's arm firmly within his own. This seemed very funny to Penelope and yet she enjoyed it. There had come a subtle but decided change in the boy's attitude toward her that day, that she felt was a clear tribute to her newly acquired young ladyhood. So, while she giggled under her breath, she enjoyed Jim's sedulous assistance at the street crossings immensely.

But try as he would, Jim could say nothing until they reached the old brownstone front. He mounted the steps with her slowly. In the dimly lighted vestibule he took both her hands.

"Look up at me, Pen," he said.

The girl looked up into the tall boy's face. Jim looked down into her sweet eyes. His own grew wistful.

"I wish I were ten years older," he said. Then very firmly: "Penelope, you belong to *me*. Remember that, always. We belong to each other. When I have made a name for myself I'm coming back to marry you."

"But," protested Pen, "I'd much rather be a duchess."

Jim held her hands firmly. "You belong to me. You shall never marry Saradokis."

Pen's soft gaze deepened as she looked into Jim's eyes. She saw a light there that stirred something within her that never before had been touched. And Jim, his face white, drew Penelope to him and laid his soft young lips to hers, holding her close with boyish arms that trembled at his own audacity, even while they were strong with a man's desire to hold.

Penelope gave a little sobbing breath as Jim released her.

"That's my sign and seal," he said slowly, "that kiss. That's to hold you until I'm a man."

The little look of tragedy that often lurked in Pen's eyes was very plain as she said: "It will be a long time before you have made a name for yourself, Still Jim. Lots of things will happen before then."

"I won't change," said Jim. "The Mannings don't." Then with a great sigh as of having definitely settled his life, he added: "Gee, I'm hungry! Me stomach is touching me backbone. Let's see if there isn't something in the pantry. Come on, Pen."

And Pen, with a sudden flash of dimples, followed him.

It was not long after Pen's birthday that the college year ended and Jim and Sara went to work. Jim had spent his previous vacations with the family at the shore. Saradokis was planning to become a construction engineer, with New York as his field. He wanted Jim to go into partnership with him when they were through college. So he persuaded Jim that it would be a good experience for them to put in their junior vacation at work on one of the mighty skyscrapers always in process of construction.

They got jobs as steam drillmen. Jim liked the work. He liked the mere sense of physical accomplishment in working the drill. He liked to be a part of the creative force that was producing the building. But to his surprise, his old sense of suffocation in being crowded in with the immigrant workman returned to him. There came back, too, some of the old melancholy questioning that he had known as a boy.

He said to Sara one day: "My father used to say that when he was a boy the phrase, 'American workman' stood for the highest efficiency in the world, but that even in his day the phrase had become a joke. How could you expect this rabble to know that there might be such a thing as an American standard of efficiency?"

Sara laughed. "Junior Economics stick out all over you, Still. This bunch does as good work as the American owners will pay for."

Jim was silent for a time, then he said: "I wonder what's the matter with us Americans? How did we come to give our country away to this horde?"

'"Us Americans!'" mimicked Saradokis. "What is an American, anyhow?"

"I'm an American," returned Jim, briefly.

"Sure," answered the Greek, "but so am I and so are most of these fellows. And none of us knows what an American is. I'll admit it was your type founded the government. But you are goners. There is no American type any more. And by and by we'll modify your old Anglo-Saxon institutions so that G. Washington will simply revolve in his grave. We'll add Greek ideas and Yiddish and Wop and Bohunk and Armenian and Nigger and Chinese and Magyar. Gee! The world will forget there ever was one of you big-headed New Englanders in this country. Huh! What is an American? The American type will have a boarding house hash beaten for infinite variety in a generation or so."

The two young men were marching along 23rd street on their way to Jim's house for dinner. At Sara's words Jim stopped and stared at the young Greek. His gray eyes were black.

"So that's the way you feel about us, you foreigners!" exclaimed Jim. "We blazed the trail for you fellows in this country and called you over here to use it. And you've suffocated us and you are glad of it. Good God! Dad and the Indians!"

"What did you call us over here for but to make us do your dirty work for you?" chuckled the Greek. "Serves you right. Piffle! What's an American want to talk about my race and thine for? There's room for all of us!"

Jim did not answer. All that evening he scarcely spoke. That night he dreamed again of his father's broken body and dying face against the golden August fields. All the next day as he sweated on the drill, the futile questionings of his childhood were with him.

At noon, Sara eyed him across the shining surface of a Child's restaurant table. Each noon they devoured a quarter of their day's wages in roast beef and baked apples.

"Are you sore at me, Still?" asked Sara. "I wasn't roasting you, personally, last night."

Jim shook his head. Sara waited for words but Jim ate on in silence.

"Oh, for the love of heaven, come out of it!" groaned Sara. "Tell me what ails you, then you can go back in and shut the door. What has got your goat? You can

think we foreigners are all rotters if you want to."

"You don't get the point," replied Jim. "I don't think for a minute that you newcomers haven't a perfect right to come over here. But I have race pride. You haven't. I can't see America turned from North European to South in type without feeling suffocated."

The young Greek stared at Jim fixedly. Then he shook his head. "You are in a bad way, my child. I prescribe a course at vaudeville tonight. I see you can still eat, though."

Jim stuck by his drill until fall. During these three months he pondered more over his father's and Exham's failure than he had for years. Yet he reached no conclusion save the blind one that he was going to fight against his own extinction, that he was going to found a family, that he was going to make the old Manning name once more known and respected.

It was after this summer that the presence of race barrier was felt by Jim and Sara. And somehow, too, after Pen's birthday there was a new restraint between the two boys. Both of them realized then that Pen was more to them than the little playmate they had hitherto considered her. Jim believed that the kiss in the vestibule bound Pen to him irretrievably. But this did not prevent him from feeling uneasy and resentful over Sara's devotion to her.

Nothing could have been more charming to a girl of Pen's age than Sara's way of showing his devotion. Flowers and candy, new books and music he showered on her endlessly, to Mrs. Manning's great disapproval. But Uncle Denny shrugged his shoulders.

"Let it have its course, me dear. 'Tis the surest cure. And Jim must learn to speak for himself, poor boy."

So the pretty game went on. Something in Sara's heritage made him a finished man of the world, while Jim was still an awkward boy. While Jim's affection manifested itself in silent watchfulness, in unobtrusive, secret little acts of thoughtfulness and care, Saradokis was announcing Pen as the Duchess to all their friends and openly singing his joy in her beauty and cleverness.

For even at sixteen Pen showed at times the clear minded thoughtfulness that later in life was to be her chief characteristic. This in spite of the fact that Uncle Denny insisted on her going to a fashionable private school. She read

enormously, anything and everything that came to hand. Uncle Denny's books on social and political economy were devoured quite as readily as Jim's novels of adventure or her own Christina Rossetti. And Sara was to her all the heroes of all the tales she read, although after the episode of the Sign and Seal some of the heroes showed a surprising and uncontrollable likeness to Jim. Penelope never forgot the kiss in the vestibule. She never recalled it without a sense of loss that she was too young to understand and with a look in her eyes that did not belong to her youth but to her Celtic temperament.

She looked Jim over keenly when the family came up from the shore and Jim was ready for his senior year. "You never were cut out for city work, Jimmy," she said.

"I'm as fit as I ever was in my life," protested Jim.

"Physically, of course," answered Pen. "But you hate New York and so it's bad for you. Get out into the big country, Still Jim. I was brought up in Colorado, remember. I know the kind of men that belong there. I love that color of necktie on you."

"Have you heard about the Reclamation Service?" asked Jim eagerly. Then he went on: "The government is building big dams to reclaim the arid west. It puts up the money and does the work and then the farmers on the Project—that's what they call the system and the land it waters—have ten years or so to pay back what it cost and then the water system belongs to them. They are going to put up some of the biggest dams in the world. I'd like to try to get into that work. Somehow I like the idea of working for Uncle Sam. James Manning, U.S.R.S.—how does that sound?"

"Too lovely for anything. I'm crazy about it. Sounds like Kipling and the pyramids and Sahara, somehow."

"Will you come out there after I get a start, Pen?" asked Jim.

"Gee! I should say not! About the time you're beginning your second dam, I'll be overwhelming the courts of Europe," Pen giggled. Then she added, serenely: "You don't realize, Still, that I'm going to be a duchess."

"Aw, Pen, cut out that silly talk. You belong to me and don't you ever think your flirtation with Sara is serious for a minute. If I thought you really did, I'd give up the Reclamation idea and go into partnership with Sara so as to watch him and

keep him from getting you."

"You and Sara would never get along in business together," said Pen, with one of her far-seeing looks. "Sara would tie you in a bowknot in business, and the older you two grow the more you are going to develop each other's worst sides."

"Nevertheless, Sara shall never get you," said Jim grimly.

Penelope gave Jim an odd glance. "Sara is my fate, Still Jim," she said soberly.

"Oh, pickles!" exclaimed Jim.

Pen tossed her head and left him.

It was in the spring of their senior year that Jim and Sara ran the Marathon. It was a great event in the world of college athletics. Men from every important college in the country competed in the tryout. For the final Marathon there were left twenty men, Sara and Jim among them.

The course was laid along Broadway from a point near Van Cortlandt Park to Columbus Circle, ten long, clean miles of asphalt. Early on the bright May morning of the race crowds began to gather along the course. At first, a thin line of enthusiasts, planting themselves on camp stools along the curb. Then at the beginning and end of the course the line, thickened to two or three deep until at last the police began to establish lines. Mounted police appeared at intervals to turn traffic. The crowd as it thickened grew more noisy. Strange college yells were emitted intermittently. Street fakirs traveled diligently up and down the lines selling college banners. At last, Broadway lay a shining black ribbon, bordered with every hue of the rainbow, awaiting the runners.

Uncle Denny had an elaborate plan for seeing the race. He and Jim's mother and Penelope established themselves at 159th street, with a waiting automobile around the corner. After the runners had passed this point, the machine was to rush them to the grand stand at Columbus Circle for the finish.

The three stood on the curb at 159th street, waiting. It was mid-afternoon when to the north, above the noise of the city, an increasing roar told of the coming of the runners. Pen, standing between Uncle Denny and Jim's mother, seized a hand of each. Far up the shining black asphalt ribbon appeared a group of white dots. The roar grew with their approach.

Suddenly Penelope leaned forward. "Sara! Sara! Jim! Jim!" she screamed.

Four men were leading the Marathon. A Californian, a Wisconsin man, Jim and Sara. Sara led, then Jim and the Californian, then the Wisconsin man with not a foot between any two of them.

Jim was running easier than Sara. He had the advantage of less weight with the same height. Sara's running pants and jersey were drenched with sweat. He was running with his mouth dropped open, head back, every superb line of his body showing under his wet clothes. His tawny hair gleamed in the sun. No sculptured marble of a Greek runner was ever more beautiful than Sara as he ran the Marathon.

Jim was running "with his nerves," head forward, teeth clenched, fists tight to his side, long, lean and lithe. His magnificent head outlined itself for an instant against the sky line of the Hudson, fine, tense, like the painting of a Saxon warrior. Pen carried this picture of him in her heart for years.

The moment the boys had passed, Uncle Denny made a run for the machine. The three entered the grand stand just as the white dots appeared under the elevated tracks at 66th street. There was a roar, a fluttering of banners, a crash of music from a band and a single runner broke from the group and staggered against the line. Saradokis had won the race.

Jim was not to be seen. Uncle Denny was frantic.

"Where's me boy?" he shouted. "He was fit to finish at the Battery when he passed us. Give me deck room here. I'm going to find him!"

CHAPTER VI

THE MARATHON

"I have seen a thing that humans call friendship. It is clearer, higher, less frequent than the thing they call love."

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

At 66th street, Jim had passed the Californian and caught up with Sara. He held Sara's pace for the next block. Try as he would, the young Greek could not throw Jim off and instinct told him that Jim had enough reserve in him to forge ahead in the final spurt at Columbus Circle, six blocks away.

But at 63rd street something happened. A fire alarm was turned in from a store in the middle of the block. The police tried to move the crowd away without interfering with the race, but just as the runners reached the point of the fire, the crowd broke into the street. A boy darted in front of Sara and Jim, and Sara struck at the lad. It was a back-handed blow and Sara brought his elbow back into Jim's stomach with a force that doubled Jim up like a closing book. Sara did not look round. A policeman jerked Jim to his feet.

"After 'em, boy. Ye still can beat the next bunch!" cried the policeman. But Jim was all in. The blow had been a vicious one and he swayed limply against the burly bluecoat.

"Dirty luck!" grunted the Irishman, and with his arm under Jim's shoulders he walked slowly with him to the rooms at Columbus Circle, where the runners were to dress. There Uncle Denny found Jim, still white and shaken, dressing slowly.

"What happened to you, me boy?" asked Uncle Denny, looking at him keenly.

Jim sat limply on the edge of a cot and told Dennis what had happened.

"The low scoundrel!" roared Uncle Denny. "Leave me get at him!"

Jim caught the purple-faced Irishman by the arm. "You are to say nothing to anyone, Uncle Denny. How could I prove that he meant to do it? And do you want me to be a loser that bellyaches?"

Uncle Denny looked Jim over and breathed hard for a moment before he replied: "Very well, me boy. But I always suspected he had a yellow streak in him and this proves it. Have you seen him do dirty tricks before?"

"I never had any proof," answered Jim carefully. "And it was always some

money matter and I'm no financier, so I laid it to my own ignorance."

"A man who will do dirt in money matters can't be a clean sport," said Uncle Denny. "This ends any chance of your going into business with him, Jim, I hope."

"I gave that idea up long ago, Uncle Denny. Pen is not to hear a word of all this, remember, won't you?"

At this moment, Saradokis burst in the door. He was dressed and his face was vivid despite his exhaustion.

"Hey, Still! What happened to you? Everybody's looking for you. Congratulate me, old scout!"

Jim looked from Sara's outstretched hand to his beaming face. Then he put his own hand in his pocket.

"That was a rotten deal you handed me, Sara," he said in the drawl that bit.

"What!" cried Sara.

"What's done's done," replied Jim. "I'm no snitcher, so you know you're safe. But I'm through with you."

Sara turned to Uncle Denny, injured innocence in his face. "What is the matter with him, Mr. Dennis?" he exclaimed.

"Still Jim, me boy, go down to the machine while I talk with Sara," said Dennis.

"No, there is no use talking," insisted Jim.

"Jim," said Dennis sternly, "I ask you to obey me but seldom."

Without a word Jim picked up the suit case containing his running togs and went down to the automobile where his mother and Penelope were waiting. To their anxious questions he merely replied that he had fallen. This was enough for the two women folk, who tucked him in between them comfortably and his mother held his hand while Pen gave him a glowing account of the finish of the race.

Jim listened with a grim smile, his gray eyes steadily fixed on Pen's lovely face. Not for worlds would he have had Penelope know that Sara had won the race on a foul. Whatever she learned about the Greek he was determined she should not learn through him. He was going to win on his own points, he told himself, and

not by tattling on his rival.

It was fifteen minutes before Dennis and Sara appeared. Sara's face was red with excitement and drawn with weariness. He walked directly to the machine and, looking up into Pen's face, exclaimed:

"If Jim has told you that I gave him a knockout to win the race, it's a lie, Pen!"

Penelope looked from Jim to Uncle Denny, then back to Sara in utter bewilderment.

"Why, Sara! He never said anything of the kind! He said he had a bad fall when the crowd closed in and that it put him out of the race."

"I told you to keep quiet, Sara, that Jim would never say anything!" cried Uncle Denny.

"Get in, both of you," said Jim's mother quietly. "Don't make a scene on the street."

"If Saradokis gets in, I'll take the Elevated home," said Jim slowly.

"Don't worry!" snapped Sara. "I'm meeting my father in a moment. Pen, you believe in me, don't you?"

Pen seized his outstretched hand and gave the others an indignant look. "Of course I do, though I don't know what it's all about."

Sara lifted his hat and turned away and the machine started homeward.

"Now, what on earth happened?" Pen cried.

Uncle Denny looked at Jim and Jim shook his head. "I'm not going to talk about it," he said. "I've a right to keep silence."

Pen bounced up and down on the seat impatiently. "You haven't any such right, Jim Manning. You've got to tell me what you said about Sara."

"Aw, let's forget it!" answered Jim wearily. "I'm sorry I ever even told Uncle Denny."

He leaned back and closed his eyes and his tired face touched Pen's heart. "You poor dear!" she exclaimed. "It was awfully hard on you to lose the race."

Jim's mother patted her boy's hand. "You are a very blind girl, Penelope," she said. "And I'm afraid it will take long years of trouble to open your eyes. We all must just stand back and wait."

The little look of pre-knowledge that occasionally made Pen's eyes old came to them now as she looked at Jim's mother. "Did you learn easily, Aunt Mary?"

The older woman shook her head. "Heaven knows," she answered, "I paid a price for what little I know, the price of experience. I guess we women are all alike."

When they reached the brownstone front, Jim went to bed at once and the matter of the race was not mentioned among the other three at supper. Pen was offended at what she considered the lack of confidence in her and withdrew haughtily to her room. Uncle Denny went out and did not return until late. Jim's mother was waiting for him in their big, comfortable bedroom.

Dennis peeled off his coat and vest and wiped his forehead. "Mary," he said, "I've been talking to the policeman who helped Jim. He says it was a deliberate knockout Sara gave Jim. He was standing right beside them at the time."

Jim's mother threw up her hands. "That Greek shall never come inside this house again, Michael!"

Dennis nodded as he walked the floor. "I don't know what to do about the matter. As a lawyer, I'd say, drop it. As Jim's best friend, I feel like making trouble for Saradokis, though I know Jim will refuse to have anything to do with it."

Jim's mother looked thoughtfully at the sock she was darning. "Jim has the right to say what shall be done. It means a lot to him in regard to its effect on Pen. But I think Pen must be told the whole story."

Uncle Denny continued to pace the floor for some time, then he sighed: "You're right, as usual, Mary. I'll tell Pen meself, and forbid Sara the house, then we'll drop it. I'm glad for one thing. This gives the last blow to any hope Sara may have had of getting Jim into business with him. Jim will take that job with the United States Reclamation Service, I hope. Though how I'm to live without me boy, Mary, its hard for me to say."

Uncle Denny's Irish voice broke and Jim's mother suddenly rose and kissed his pink cheek.

"Michael," she said, "even if I hadn't grown so fond of you for your own sake, I would have to love you for your love for Jim."

A sudden smile lighted the Irishman's face and he gave the slender little woman a boyish hug.

"We are the most comfortable couple in the world, Mary!" he cried.

Uncle Denny told the story of the boys' trouble to Penelope the next morning. Pen flatly refused to believe it.

"I don't doubt that Jim thinks Sara meant it," she said. "But I am surprised at Jim. And I shall have to tell you, Uncle Denny, that if you forbid Sara the house I shall meet him clandestinely. I, for one, won't turn down an old friend."

Pen was so firm and so unreasonable that she alarmed Dennis. In spite of his firm resolution to the contrary, he felt obliged to tell Jim of Penelope's obstinacy.

"I wish I'd kept my silly mouth shut," said Jim, gloomily. "Of course that's just the effect the story would have on Pen. She is nothing if not loyal. Here she comes now. Uncle Denny, I might as well have it out with her."

The two men were standing on the library hearth rug in the old way. Pen came in with her nose in the air and fire in her eyes. Uncle Denny fled precipitately.

Jim looked at Penelope admiringly. She was growing into a very lovely young womanhood. She was not above medium height and she was slender, yet full of long, sweet curves.

"Jim!" she exclaimed, "I don't believe a word of that horrid story about Sara."

Jim nodded. "I'm sorry it was told you. I'm not going to discuss it with you, Pen. You were told the facts without my consent. You have a right to your own opinion. Say, Pen, I can get my appointment to the Reclamation Service and I'm going out west in a couple of weeks. I—I want to say something to you."

Jim moistened his lips and prayed for the right words to come. Pen looked a little bewildered. She had come in to champion Sara and was not inclined to discuss Jim's job instead. But Jim found words and spoke eagerly:

"I'm going away, Pen, to make some kind of a name to bring back to you and then, when I've made it, I'm coming for you, Penelope." He put his strong young hands on Pen's shoulders and looked clearly into her eyes. "You belong to me,

Penelope. You never can belong to Sara. You know that."

Pen looked up into Jim's face a little pitifully. "Still Jim, way back in my heart is a feeling for you that belongs to no one else. You—you are fine, Jim, and yet—Oh, Jim, if you want me, you'd better take me now because," this with a sudden gust of girlish confidence, "because, honestly, I'm just crazy about Sara, and I know you are better for me than he is!"

Jim gave a joyful laugh. "I'd be a mucker to try to make you marry me now, Penny. You are just a kid. And just a dear. There is an awful lot to you that Sara can never touch. You show it only to me. And it's mine."

"You'd better stay on the job, Still," said Pen, warningly.

Again Jim laughed. "Why, you sent me out west yourself."

Pen nodded. "And it will make a man of you. It will wake you up. And when you wake up, you'll be a big man, Jimmy."

Pen's old look was on her face. "What do you mean, Pen?" asked Jim.

The girl shook her head. "I don't quite know. Some day, when I've learned some of the lessons Aunt Mary says are coming to me, I'll tell you." Then a look almost of fright came to Pen's face. "I'm afraid to learn the lessons, Still Jim. Take me with you now, Jimmy."

The tall boy looked at her longingly, then he said:

"Dear, I mustn't. It wouldn't be treating you right." And there was a sudden depth of passion in his young voice as he added, "I'm going to give you my sign and seal again, beloved."

And Jim lifted Penelope in his strong arms and laid his lips to hers in a hot young kiss that seemed to leave its impress on her very heart. As he set her to her feet, Penelope gave a little sob and ran from the room.

Nothing that life brings us is so sure of itself as first love; nothing ever again seems so surely to belong to life's eternal verities. Jim went about his preparations for graduating and for leaving home with complete sense of security. He had arranged his future. There was nothing more to be said on the matter. Fate had no terror for Jim. He had the bravery of untried youth.

The next two weeks were busy and hurried. Pen, a little wistful eyed whenever

she looked at Jim, avoided being alone with him. Saradokis did not come to the house again. He took two weeks in the mountains after graduation before beginning the contracting business which his father had built up for him.

As the time drew near for leaving home, Jim planned to say a number of things to his Uncle Denny. He wanted to tell him about his feeling for Pen and he wanted to tell how much he was going to miss the fine old Irishman's companionship. He wanted to tell him that he was not merely Jim Manning, going to work, but that he was a New Englander going forth to retrieve old Exham. But the words would not come out and Jim went away without realizing that Uncle Denny knew every word he would have said and vastly more, that only the tender Irish heart can know.

Jim's mother, Uncle Denny and Pen went to the station with him. He kissed his mother, wrung Pen's and Dennis' hands, then climbed aboard the train and reappeared on the observation platform. His face was rigid. His hat was clenched in his fist. None of the watching group was to forget the picture of him as the train pulled out. The tall, boyish figure in the blue Norfolk suit, the thick brown hair tossed across his dreamer's forehead, and the half sweet, half wistful smile set on his young lips.

There were tears on Jim's mother's cheeks and in Pen's eyes, but Uncle Denny broke down and cried.

"He's me own heart, Still Jim is!" he sobbed.

CHAPTER VII

THE CUB ENGINEER

"Humans constantly shift sand and rock from place to place. They call this work. I have seen time return their every work to the form in which it was created."

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

It was hard to go. But Jim was young and adventure called him. As the train began its long transcontinental journey, Jim would not have exchanged places with any man on earth. He was a full-fledged engineer. He was that creature of unmatched vanity, a young man with his first job. And Jim's first job was with his government. The Reclamation Service was, to Jim's mind, a collection of great souls, scientifically inclined, giving their lives to their country, harvesting their rewards in adventure and in the abandoned gratitude of a watching nation.

Jim was headed for the Green Mountain project which was located in the Indian country of the far Northwest. There were not many months of work left on the dam or the canals. But Jim was to report to the engineer in charge of this project to receive from him his first training.

This was Jim's first trip away from the Atlantic coast. He was a typical Easterner, accustomed to landscapes on a small scale and to the human touch on everything. Until he left St. Paul, nothing except the extreme width of the map really surprised him. But after the train had crossed the Mississippi valley, it began to traverse vast rolling plains, covered from horizon to horizon with wheat. At endless intervals were set tiny dwellings like lone sentinels guarding the nation's bread. After the plains, came an arid country where a constantly beaten vegetation fought with the alkali until at last it gave way to a world of yellow sand and purple sky.

After a day of this, far to the west appeared a delicate line of snowcapped peaks toward which the flying train snailed for hours, until Jim, watching eagerly, saw the sand give way to low grassy hills, the hills merge into ridges and the ridges into pine-clad mountain slopes.

For the last two days of the trip the train swung through dizzy spaces, slid

through dim, dripping canyons, crossed trestles even greater than the trestles of Jim's boyhood dreams; twisted about peaks that gave unexpected, fleeting views of other peaks of other ranges until Jim crawled into his berth at night sight-weary and with a sense of loneliness that appalled him.

At noon of a bright day, Jim landed at a little way station from which a single-gauge track ran off into apparent nothingness. Puffing on the single-gauge track was a "dinky" engine, coupled to a flat car. Wooden benches were fastened along one end of the car. The engineer and fireman were loading sheet iron on the other end. They looked Jim over as he approached them.

"Do you go up to the dam?" he asked.

"If we ever get this stuff loaded," replied the engineer.

"I'd like to go up with you," said Jim. "I've got a job up there."

The engineer grunted. "Another cub engineer. All right, sonny. Load your trousseau onto the Pullman."

Jim grinned sheepishly and heaved his trunk and suit case up on the flat car. Then he lent a hand with the sheet iron and climbed aboard.

"Let her rip, Bill," said the fireman. And she proceeded to rip. Jim held his hat between his knees and clung to the bench with both hands. The dinky whipped around curves and across viaducts, the grade rising steadily until just as Jim had made up his mind that his moments were numbered, they reached the first steep grade into the mountain. From this point the ride was a slow and steady climb up a pine-covered mountain. Just before sunset the engine stopped at a freight shed.

"Go on up the trail," said the fireman. "We'll send your stuff up to the officers' camp."

Jim saw a wide macadam road leading up through the pines. The unmistakable sounds of great construction work dropped faintly down to him. His pulse quickened and he started up the road which wound for a quarter of a mile through trees the trunks of which were silhouetted against the setting sun. Then the road swept into the open. Jim stopped.

First he saw ranges, stretching away and away to the evening glory of the sky. Then, nearer, he saw solitary peaks, etched black against the heavens, and groups of peaks whose mighty flanks merged as if in a final struggle for supremacy.

The boy saw a country of mighty distances, of indescribable cruelty and hostility, a country of unthinkable heights and impassable depths. And, standing so, struggling to resist the sense of the region's terrifying bigness, he saw that all the valleys and canyons and mountain slopes seemed to focus toward one point. It was as if they had concentrated at one spot against a common enemy.

This point, he saw, was a huge black canyon that carried the waters from all the hundred hills around. It was the point where the war of waters must be keenest, where the stand of the wilderness was most savage and where lay the one touch of man in all that area of contending mountains.

A vast wall of masonry had been built to block the outlet of the ranges. A curving wall of gray stone, so huge, so naked of conscious adornment that the hills might well have disbelieved it to be an enemy and have accepted it as part and parcel of their own silent grandeur.

Jim lifted his hat slowly and moistened his lips. This, then, was the labor to which he had so patronizingly offered his puny hands.

After a while, details obtruded themselves. Jim saw black dots of men moving about the top of the dam. He heard the clatter of concrete mixers, the raucous grind of the crusher, the scream of donkey engines and the shouts of foremen. Back to the right, among the trees, was a long military line of tents. Above the noise of construction the boy caught the silent brooding of the forest and, poured round all, the liquid glory of the sunset. Suddenly he saw the whole great picture as his own work, and it was a picture as elusive, as tantalizing, as a boy's first dreams of pirate adventure. Jim had come to his first great dam.

When he had shaken himself together and had swallowed the lump in his throat, he asked a passing workman for Mr. Freet, the Project Engineer. He was directed to a tent with a sheet iron roof. Jim stopped bashfully in the door. A tall man was standing before a map. Jim had a good look at him before he turned around.

Mr. Freet wore corduroy riding breeches and leather puttees, a blue flannel shirt and soft tie. He was thin and tall and had a shock of bright red hair. When he turned, Jim saw that his face was bronzed and deeply lined. His eyes were black and small and piercing.

"Mr. Freet," said Jim, "my name is Manning."

The project engineer came forward with a pleasant smile. "Why, Mr. Manning,

we didn't look for you until tomorrow, though your tent is ready for you. Come in and sit down."

Jim took the proffered camp chair and after a few inquiries about his trip, Mr. Freet said: "It's supper time and I'll take you over to the mess and introduce you. Only a few of the engineers have their wives here and all the others, with the so-called 'office' force, eat at 'Officers' Mess'. I'm not going to load you up with advice, Mr. Manning. You are a tenderfoot and fresh from college. You occupy the position of cub engineer here, so you will be fair bait for hazing. Don't take it too seriously. About your work? I shall put you into the hands of the chief draughtsman for a time. I want you to thoroughly familiarize yourself with that end of the work. Then, although most of that part is done, you will go into the concrete works, then out on the dam with the superintendent. Remember that you have no record except some good college work. Forget that you ever were a senior. Look at yourself as a freshman in a difficult course, where too many cons means a life failure."

Jim listened respectfully. At that moment Arthur Freet was the biggest man on earth to him.

"Yes, sir," he said. "Thank you."

Freet pulled on a corduroy coat. "Come over to supper, Manning. Too much advice on an empty stomach is bad for the digestion."

Jim followed meekly after the Big Boss.

Jim reported to Charlie Tuck, the head draughtsman the next morning. Tuck was a plump, middle-aged man, bald headed and clean shaven, with mild blue eyes. Jim put him down in his own mind as a sissy and chafed a little at being put into Tuck's care. But his discontent was shortlived.

Tuck proved to be a hard taskmaster. Before the end of the week Jim realized that he would not get out of Tuck's hands until he knew every inch of the design of the great dam from the sluice gates and the drainage holes to the complete vertical section. He had no patience with mistakes and Jim took his grilling in silence, for the fat little man showed a deep knowledge of the technical side of dam building that reduced the cub engineer to a humble pulp.

Also, Jim discovered that Tuck was an old Yale man and that his avocation in life seemed to be tennis. The engineers had a good court in the woods and after

Tuck found that Jim liked the game, he took the boy over to the court every afternoon before supper and beat him with monotonous regularity. And Jim was a good player.

The dam was far from civilization and the engineers welcomed Jim, although they treated him with the jocularity that his youth and inexperience demanded. The novelty of his environment, the romance of the great gray dam, built with such frightful risk and difficulty, absorbed Jim for the first week or so. He had no thought of homesickness until the excitement of his new work began to recede. And then, quite unexpectedly, it descended on him like a leaden cloud.

The longing for home! The helpless, hopeless sickness of the heart for dear familiar faces! The seeing of alien places through tear-dimmed eyes, the answering to strange voices with an aching throat, and the poignancy of memory! Jim's mind dwelt monotonously on the worn spot in the library hearth rug where he and Uncle Denny had spent so many, many hours. There was the crack in the brown teapot that his mother would not discard because she had poured Big Jim's tea from it. There was Uncle Denny's rich Irish voice, "Ah, Still Jim, me boy!" And there was Pen—dear, dear Penelope, with her woman's eyes in her child's face—with her halo of hair. Pen's "Take me with you, Still," was the very peak of sorrow now to the boy. Jim was homesick. And he who has not known homesickness does not know one of life's most exquisite griefs.

It seemed to Jim now that he hated the Big Country. At night in his tent he was conscious of the giant dam lying so silent in the darkness and it made him feel helpless and alone. By day he hid his unhappiness, he thought. He worked doggedly and did not guess that Charlie Tuck understood that many times he saw the designs for the wonderful bronze gates of the sluicing tunnel over which Charlie heckled him for days, through tear-dimmed eyes.

The camp was lighted by electricity. Jim would sit watching the lights flare up after supper, watching the night shift on the broad top of the dam which was as wide as a street and try to pretend that the noise and the light and the figures belonged to 23rd street. Jim was sitting so in the door of his tent one night after nearly a month in camp. He held his pipe but could not smoke because of the ache in his throat. He had not been there long when Charlie Tuck came up the trail and with a nod sat down beside Jim.

"Let me have a light," he said. "The fellows are having a rough house over in the office tonight. Why don't you go over?"

"I don't feel like it, somehow," replied Jim.

Tuck nodded. "You may have hated New York while you lived there, but it looks good now, eh?"

"Yes," answered Jim.

"You'll feel better when the Boss begins to give you some responsibility. Were you ever up in the Makon country, Manning?"

"No," said Jim.

"Don't strain yourself talking," commented Tuck, sarcastically. "You are rather given to blathering, I see. Well, the Makon country wants a dam. It wants it bad but the Service doesn't see how to get in there. There is a big valley that has been partially farmed for years. It is enormously fertile, but there is only enough water in it to irrigate a limited number of farms.

"Now, ten miles to the north, is the Makon river that never fails of water. But as near as anyone can find out the only feasible place for damming it is somewhere in a beastly canyon that no man has ever gone through alive. The river is treacherous and the country would make this look as well manicured as the Swiss Alps."

Jim listened intently. Charlie Tuck pulled at his pipe for a time, then he said: "My end of this job is about finished. I like the exploring end of the work best, anyhow. I was with the Geological Survey for ten years before the Reclamation Service was created. I made the preliminary surveys for this project and for the Whitson. I tell you, Manning, that's the greatest work in the world—getting out into the wilderness and finding the right spot for civilization to come and thrive. There's where you get a sense of power that makes you feel like a Pilgrim Father. The Reclamation Service is a great pipe dream. Some of the finest men in the country are in it today and nobody knows it."

"Like Mr. Freet," said Jim.

Jim thought that Tuck hesitated for a moment before he answered. "Yes, and a dozen others. I consider it a privilege to work with them. Say, Manning, if some way they could find the right level in that canyon and drive a tunnel through its solid granite walls, they could send the Makon over into the valley."

"Why doesn't the Service send a man to explore the crevice?" asked Jim.

"That's what I say!" cried Tuck. "Just because a lot of cold feet claim it can't be done, just because no man has come through that crevice alive, is no reason one won't. Say, Manning, if I can get the Service to send me up there, will you go with me?"

"Me!" gasped Jim.

Tuck nodded in his gentle way. "Yes, you see I like you. You are more congenial than most of the fellows here to me. On a trip like that you want to be mighty sure you like the fellow you are going to be with. Then I think you would learn more on a trip like that than in a year of the sort of work Freet plans for you. And last, because I think you've got the same kind of feeling for the Service that I have though you've been here so short a time. It's something that's born in you. What do you say, Manning?"

Jim never had felt so flattered in his life. And Adventure called to him like a ship to a land-locked mariner.

"Gee!" he cried, "but you're good to ask me, Mr. Tuck! Bet your life I'll go!"

Tuck emptied his pipe and rose. "I'll go see Freet now and persuade him to get busy with the Chief in Washington. One thing, Manning. It will be a dangerous undertaking. We may not come through alive. You must get used to the idea, though, that every Project demands its toll of deaths. People don't realize that. Are you willing to go, knowing the risk?"

With all the valor of youth and ignorance, Jim answered, "I'm ready to start now."

Mr. Freet was not adverse to the undertaking and the Washington office shrugged its shoulders. The Project engineer talked seriously to Jim, though, about the danger of the mission and insisted that he write home about it before finally committing himself. Jim's letter home, however, would have moved a far more stolid spirit than Uncle Denny, for he sketched the danger hazily and dwelt at length on the honor and glory of the undertaking. The reply from the brownstone front was as enthusiastic as Jim could desire.

Tuck undertook the preparations for the expedition with the utmost care. Only the two of them were to go. The outfit must be such as they could handle themselves, yet as complete as possible. Two folding canvas boats, two air mattresses, life preservers, waterproof bags, first aid appliances, brandy, sweet

oil, surveying implements, food in as compact form as possible, guns and fishing tackle made a formidable pile for two men to manage. But at Jim's protest Charlie answered grimly that they would not be heavily laden when they came out of the canyon.

It was mid-August when the two men reached the Makon country. They arranged with a rancher to take them and their outfit up to the river. There was no road, scarcely even a trail up to the canyon. The green of the ranches was encircled by a greasewood-covered plain that, toward the river, became rock covered and rough so that a wagon was out of the question and the sturdy pack horses themselves could move but slowly.

Jim's first view of the Makon Canyon was of a black rift in a rough brown sea of sand, with a blue gray sky above. As the little pack train drew nearer he saw that the walls of the rift were weathered and broken into fissures and points of seeming impassable roughness. So deep and so craggy were these walls that the river a half mile below could be seen only at infrequent intervals. The labor of getting into the crevice would be quite as difficult, Jim thought, as going through it.

They made camp that night close beside the canyon edge. Early the next morning the rancher left them and Charlie and Jim prepared to get themselves and their outfit down over the mighty, bristling walls. Lowering each other and the packs by ropes, sliding, rolling, jumping, crawling, it was night before they reached the river's edge, where they made camp. There was a narrow sandy beach with a cottonwood tree growing close to the granite wall. Under this they put their air mattresses and built their fire.

Jim did not like the feeling of nervousness he had in realizing how deep they were below the desert and how narrow and oppressive were the canyon walls. He was glad that the strenuous day sent them off to bed and to sleep as soon as they had finished supper. They were up at dawn.

Charlie's purpose was to work down the river, surveying as he went until he found a level where the river would flow through a tunnel out onto the valley. And this level, too, must be at a point where construction work was possible. The river was incredibly rough and treacherous. From the first they packed everything in waterproof bags. The canvas canoes were impractical. The river was full of hidden rock and by the third day the second canoe was torn to pieces and they were depending on rafts made from the air mattresses.

After the canoes were gone, they spent practically all the daylight in the water, swimming or wading and towing or pushing the mattresses. The water was very cold but they were obliged to work so hard that they scarcely felt the chill until they made camp at night. Jim discovered that a transit could be used in a cauldron of water or on a peak of rock where a slip meant instant death or clinging to steep walls that threatened rock slide at the misplacing of a pebble.

One arduous task was the locating of a camp at night. The second night in the camp they were lucky. They found a broad ledge in a spot that at first seemed hopeless, for the blank walls appeared here almost to meet above the deep well of water. There was a little driftwood on the ledge and they had a fire. The following two nights they were less fortunate. The best they could find were chaotic heaps of fallen rock on which to lay their mattresses, and they slept with extreme discomfort.

The fifth day was a black day. They were swimming slowly behind their laden mattresses through deep, smooth black water when, without warning, the river curved and swept over a small fall into heavy rapids. Instantly the mattresses were whirling like chips. The two men fought like mad to tow them to a rock ledge, the only visible landing place the crevice had to offer. But long before this haven was reached the mattresses were torn to shreds and Jim and Charlie were glad to reach the ledge with their surveying instruments and two bags of "grub." Here they sat dripping and exhausted. It was nearly dark. Night set in early in the canyon. They dared not try to look for a better camping ground that night. The ledge was just large enough for the two of them, with what remained of their dunnage.

Charlie grinned. "Welcome to our city. Well, it's as good as a Pullman berth at that."

"And no harder to dress on," said Jim, standing up carefully and beginning to peel off his wet clothes. "I guess if we wring these duds out and rub with alcohol, they won't feel so cold."

Charlie rose and began to undress gingerly. "You can stand up to make your toilet," he said, "which is more than the Pullman offers you."

They ate a cold canned supper and afterward, as they sat shivering, Jim said, "If we fail to locate the dam site, no one will have any sympathy with our troubles."

"We will find it," said Charlie with the calm certainty he never had lost. "Jupiter

looks as big as a dinner plate down here. Sometimes when I look at the stars I wonder what is the use of this kind of work."

Jim looked up at the stars which seemed almost within hand touch. Their nearness was an unspeakable comfort to the two in the crevice. He spoke slowly but with unusual ease. Charlie Tuck had grown very near to him in the past few days.

"I've had a feeling," he said, "ever since we actually got down here and on the job, that I'm doing the thing I've always been intended to do. I don't know how I got that feeling because I've always lived in towns."

"I feel that way every time I go out exploring," answered Tuck. "I can stand the draughting board just so long and then I break loose. I suppose someone has got to do these jobs and there is always someone willing to take the responsibility. Kipling calls it being a Son of Martha. Do you know those verses?"

"No," said Jim. "I'd like to hear them."

Charlie chuckled. "Me reciting Kipling is like hearing a 'co-ed yell'—it's the only poem I know, though, and here goes. The Sons of Martha

'—say to the Mountains, Be ye removed! They say to the lesser floods, run dry!
Under their rods are the rocks reproved. They are not afraid of that which is high.
Then do the hilltops shake to their summits, then is the bed of the deep laid bare,
That the Sons of Mary may overcome it, pleasantly sleeping and unaware.

They do not preach that their God will rouse them a little before the nuts break loose,
They do not teach that His pity allows them to leave their work whenever they choose.
As in the thronged and the lighted ways, so in the dark and the desert they stand,
Wary and watchful all their days that their brethren's days may be long in the land.

Lift ye the stone or cleave the wood to make a path more fair or flat,
Lo, it is black already with blood some Son of Martha spilled for that.

Not as a ladder from Earth to Heaven, not as an altar to any creed,
But simple Service, simply given, to their own kind, in their common need.'"

The two men sat in silence after Charlie had finished until he said: "If I were you I'd read Kipling a good deal. He's good food for a man of your type. People don't realize what their comforts cost. I hope that when I die it will be on a Son of Martha job. I'm built that way. My people were New Englanders, then middle west pioneers, and now here I am, still breaking the wilderness."

Jim sat with his heart swelling with he knew not what great dream. It was the divine fire of young sacrifice, the subtle sense of devotion that has made men since the world began lay down their lives for the thing not seen with the eye.

"I wish you'd teach me those verses," said Jim. "We've got to keep awake or roll off the ledge."

And so the night passed.

The next day the way was unspeakably difficult. They made progress slowly and heavily, clambering from rock to rock, clinging to the walls, fighting through rapids. It was past mid afternoon when they ran a level in a spot of surpassing grandeur. A rock slide had sent a great heap of stone into the river. Close beside this they set the transit. Forward the river swept smoothly round a curve. Back, the two looked on a magnificent series of flying buttresses of serrated granite, their bases guarding the river, their tops remotely supporting the heavens. The buttresses nearest the rock heap and on opposite sides of the river were not two rods apart.

They ran the levels carefully and then looked at each other in silence. Then they made another reading and again looked at each other. Then they packed the transit into its rubber bag, sat down on the rock heap and gazed at the marching, impregnable line of buttresses.

"It will be even higher than the Green Mountain and a hundred times more difficult to build," said Charlie, softly.

"She'll be a wonder, won't she!" exclaimed Jim. "The Makon dam. It will be the highest in the world."

"Granite and concrete! Some beauty that! Eternal as the hills!" said Charlie. "We will make camp and finish the map here."

They lay long, looking at the stars that night. "Some day," said Jim, "there will be a two hundred feet width of concrete wall right where we are lying. Doesn't it make you feel a little hollow in your stomach to think that you and I have decreed where it shall be?"

"Yes," said Charlie. "It's a good spot, Manning. I hope I get a chance to lay out the road down here. They will have to blast it out of the solid granite. It will eat money up to make it."

"Let me in on it, won't you," pleaded Jim.

"Well, slightly!" exclaimed Charlie. "Now for a good night's sleep. We ought to be out in three days. That will make ten days in all, just what I planned."

Jim hardly knew Charlie the next day. No college freshman on his first holiday ever acted more outrageously. He sang ancient college songs that reverberated in the canyon like yells on a football field. He stood solemnly on his head on the top of rock pinnacles. He crowned himself and Jim with wreaths made of water cress that he found on a tiny sandy beach. When they were obliged to take to the water he pretended that he was an alligator and made uncouth sounds and lashed the water with the grub bag in lieu of a tail.

Late in the afternoon, while they were swimming through a whirlpool, he insisted on giving Jim a lecture on the gentle art of bee-hunting as he had seen it practiced in Maine.

"Now we will pretend that I am the bee!" he shouted at Jim. "You will admit that I look like one! I am drunk with honey and I hang to the comb thus!"

He caught a point of rock with one hand and lazily waved the other.

"This is my proboscis," he explained.

"For heaven's sake, be careful!" yelled Jim. "This is no blooming ten-cent show! Keep both hands on the rock and climb up for a rest."

Charlie suddenly went white. "God! I've got cramp!" he screamed. "Both legs. Help me, Manning!"

He struggled to get his free hand on the rock, but the water tore at him like a ravening beast and he lost his hold. Jim swam furiously after him. The white head showed for a moment, then disappeared around a turn of the wall.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BROKEN SEAL

"When I was young I thought the world was made for love. Now I know that love made the world."

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

How he passed the night that followed Jim never was sure. He knew that he fought his way down stream until long after darkness set in. Then, utterly exhausted, bleeding and bruised, he crawled up onto a rock under the wall and lay dripping and shivering until dawn.

He watched the light touch the far top of the crevice, saw the azure strip of the sky appear and then with a deep groan he forced himself to eat from his grub bag and started hurriedly on down the river. The stream was much deeper below the point of the accident, with several large falls. Jim worked his way along carefully, swimming or floating for the most part, for the walls for many miles offered not even a hand-hold nor did they once give back in beach or eddy.

The loneliness was appalling. The hardship of the work was astonishingly increased, robbed of Tuck's unfailing cheerfulness and faith. There was one moment when, toward sunset, Jim's strength almost failed him. The walls were rougher now. He had found a hand-hold but no place for the night. He clung here until his exhausted arms were able to endure no more.

"I can't do any more!" panted Jim. "I'll have to go down." And then he gave a little childish sob. "'Hang on to what you undertake like a hound to a warm scent, Jimmy!'" he said, brokenly. And new strength flowed into his arms and he swam on for a few moments, finding then a bit of shore on which to spend the night. He and Charlie had each carried a map and a set of instruments. Jim felt that he bore now not only his own but Charlie's responsibility to deliver the maps to Freet. As he lay looking up at the stars, that second night alone in the crevice, Jim realized ever since he and Charlie had started on the expedition, he had ceased to be homesick. He realized this when, on this second night, he tried to keep his nerves in order by thinking very hard of home and he found that he dwelt most on Exham and his father and the Sign and Seal he had given Penelope. And that while he longed vaguely for the old brownstone front, he felt with a sudden invigorating thrill that he belonged where he was and that he was nearer to Exham than he had been since he had left there.

It was nearing evening of the fourth day after Charlie's disappearance that Jim suddenly saw the canyon walls widen. He struggled at last up onto a sandy beach

and looked about him. The canyon walls here, though very rough, gave promise of access to the top. Jim examined the beach carefully for trace of Charlie and, finding none, he prepared to spend the night in resting before the stiff climb of the next day. He built a fire and ate his last bit of grub, a small can of beans, and fell asleep immediately.

At dawn the next morning he began his climb up the bristling walls of the canyon. Eleven days before he would have said that to scale these sickening heights was impossible. But Jim would never be a tenderfoot again. He had been on short rations for three days and was weak from overwork. But he had a canteen of water and rested frequently and he went about the climb with the care and skill of an old mountaineer. He had learned in a cruel school.

Late in the afternoon he crawled wearily over one last knife-edged ledge and hoisted himself up onto the canyon's top. He was greeted by a faint shout.

Three men on horseback were picking their way carefully toward him. Jim waved his hand and dropped, panting, to await their arrival. When they were within speaking distance, he rose weakly and called:

"Where's Charlie Tuck?"

The three men did not answer until they had dropped from their horses beside Jim; then the rancher who had packed the expedition to the crevice said:

"They picked his body up near Chaseville this morning. We come up as quick as we could for trace of you. You look all in. Here, Dick, get busy! We brought some underclothes; didn't know what shape you'd be in. Here is the suit you left at my place. God! I thought you'd never need it. Billy, start a fire and cook the coffee and bacon. You've had an awful experience, Mr. Manning, I guess. You don't look the tenderfoot kid that went into the canyon!"

"We found the dam site," said Jim hoarsely.

"Don't try to talk till you get some grub," said the man called Billy.

Clothed and fed, Jim told his story, a little brokenly. The group of men who listened were used to hardy deeds. They had seen Nature demand her toll of death again and again in the wilderness. And yet as they sat looking at the young fellow with his gray eyes shocked and grief-stricken and perceived his boyish idolatry of Charlie Tuck, something like moisture shone in their eyes. They shook hands with Jim when he had finished, silently for the most part, though

the rancher said:

"You're the only man ever came through there alive. They had to bury Tuck right off. They'd ought to build a monument for him. Where is his folks?"

"He had none," said Jim. "I want to put up his headstone for him, and I know just what lines are going to be put on the stone."

"They ought to be blamed good," said Dick.

"What are they?" asked the ranchman.

Jim sat for a moment looking down into the fearful depths where Charlie and he had lived a lifetime. Then he said:

> "'Lift ye the stone or cleave the wood, to make a path more fair or flat,
> Lo, it is black already, with blood some Son of Martha spilled for that!
> Not as a ladder from Earth to Heaven, not as an altar to any creed,
> But simple Service, simply given, to his own kind, in their common need.'"

And so Charlie Tuck crossed the Great Divide.

Jim stopped two days with the rancher and then went back to the Green Mountain dam. The story of the trip through the crevice had preceded him. The men of the Service were inured to the idea of the sacrifice of blood for the dams. There was little said, some silent handshakes given, and they ceased to haze Jim. He had become one of them.

The plans for the preliminary surveys of the Makon Project were begun at once. Jim remained at Green Mountain during the winter, serving his apprenticeship to the concrete works and the superintendent as Mr. Freet had planned. But in the spring he had his wish and was sent to lay out the road on the Makon project.

All this time letters came regularly from the brownstone front, but they were from Jim's mother and his Uncle Denny for the most part, and they were very silent about Penelope. Jim wrote Pen from time to time, but he was not an easy writer and Pen wrote him only gay little notes that were very unsatisfactory. But Jim was absorbed in his work and did not worry over this.

Mr. Freet explained to Jim that he needed an "Old Timer" in laying out the Makon road whose practical experience would supplement Jim's theories. When

Jim reached the survey camp in the Makon valley he found waiting for him a small man of about fifty, with a Roman nose, bright blue eyes and a shock of gray hair. This was Iron Skull Williams, whom Freet had described in detail to Jim and who was to be Jim's right hand. He was an old Indian fighter. The Apaches, Freet said, had given him his nickname because they claimed he would not be killed. Bullets glanced off his head like rain. Williams was an expert road maker and had worked much for Freet in various parts of the west.

Jim and Williams looked each other over carefully and liked each other at once. They found immediately in each other's society something very choice. The friendship had not been a week old before Iron Skull had heard of Exham and the brownstone front and of Penelope. While Jim had learned what no other man knew, that Williams' life-long, futile passion had been for a college education and that he was a bachelor because a blue-eyed, yellow-haired girl had been buried in the Arizona ranges, twenty-five years before.

Jim's quiet ways and silent tongue did not make him an easy mixer. The opening up of a project is a rough and lonesome job. Running surveys through unknown country where supplies are hard to get and distances are huge, makes men very dependent on one other for companionship. Jim liked the young fellows who ran the road surveys with him. He enjoyed the "rough necks," the men who did the actual building of the road. They all in turn liked Jim. But Jim had not the easy coin of word exchange that makes for quick and promiscuous acquaintanceship. So he grew very dependent on Iron Skull, who, in a way, filled both Sara's and Uncle Denny's place.

The old Indian fighter had that strange sense of proportion, that eagle-eyed view of life that the desert sometimes breeds. All the love of a love-starved life he gave to Jim.

One evening in April Jim came in from a hard day on horseback. The spring rains were on and he was mud-splashed and tired but full of a great content. He had found a short cut on the crevice end of the road that would save thousands of dollars in time and material.

He lighted the lamp in his tent and saw a letter from Uncle Denny on the table. There was nothing unusual about a letter from Uncle Denny and ordinarily Jim waited for his bath and clean clothes before reading it. But this time, with an inexplicable sense of fear, he picked it up and read it at once.

"STILL JIM, MY BOY:

We've had a blow. All the year Penelope has been seeing Saradokis. She has made no bones of it, and he would not let her alone. I could do nothing, though I talked till I was no better than a common scold. But it never occurred to your mother and me that Pen could do what she did.

Day before yesterday, just at noon, she called me up at the office and told me she and Sara had just been married at the Little Church Round the Corner and were leaving for Montauk Point in Sara's new high power car. She rang off before I could answer.

I sat at my desk, paralyzed. I couldn't even call your mother up. I sat there for half an hour, seeing and hearing nothing when your mother called me up. There had been an accident. Sara had disobeyed a traffic policeman, they had run into a truck at full speed. His car was wrecked. Pen escaped with a broken arm. Sarah had been apparently paralyzed. Pen had him brought to our house.

Well, I got home. It has been a fearful two days. Sara is hopelessly paralyzed from the waist down. He may live forever or die any time. He is like a raving devil.

Pen—Still Jim, my boy—Little Pen is paying a fearful price for her foolishness. She is like a person wakened from a dream. She says she cannot see what made her give in to Sara.

I've made a bad job of telling you this, Jimmy. Your mother says to tell you she understands. She will write later.

Love, dear boy, from
UNCLE DENNY."

Jim crumpled the letter into his pocket and dashed out into the night. For hours he walked, heedless of rock or cactus, of rain or direction. He took a fiendish satisfaction in the thought of Sara's tragedy. Other than this he did not think at all. He felt as he had at his father's death, rudderless, derelict.

It was dawn when Iron Skull found Jim sitting on a pile of rock five miles from camp. He put his hand on Jim's shoulder.

"Boss Still," he said, "what's broke loose? I've trailed you all over the state."

Jim looked up into the kindly face and his throat worked. "Iron Skull," he got out at last, "my—my girl has thrown me down!"

Williams sat down beside him. "Not Penelope?"

Jim nodded and suddenly thrust the crumpled letter into his friend's hands. In the dawn light Williams read it, cleared his throat, and said:

"God! Poor kids! I take it your folks don't like this Sara, though you never said so."

Jim put his hand on Iron Skull's knee. "Iron Skull," he said, hoarsely, "I'd rather see Pen laid away there in the Arizona ranges beside your Mary than married to him. He's got a yellow streak."

The two sat silent for a time, then Williams said: "This love business is a queer thing. Some men can care for a dozen different women. But you're like me. Once and never again. I ain't going to try to comfort you, partner. I know you've got a sore inside you that'll never heal. It's hell or heaven when a woman gets a hold on your vitals like that.—My Mary—she had blue eyes and a little brown freckle on her nose—I was just your age when she died. And I never was a kid again. You gotta face forward, partner. Work eighteen hours a day. Marry your job. You still owe a big debt for your big brain. Go ahead and pay it."

Jim did not answer, but he did not remove his hand from Williams' knee, and finally Williams laid a hard palm on it. They watched the sun rise. The rain had ceased. Far to the east where the little camp lay, crimson spokes shot to the zenith. Suddenly the sun rolled above the desert's brim and leading straight and level to its scarlet center lay the road that Jim was building.

"It's a good road," said Jim unevenly. "It's my first one. I'd planned to show it to her, this summer. And now, she'll never see it—nor any of my work. Iron Skull, she had a bully mind. Just the little notes she's sent me, show she got the idea of the Projects. I guess I'm a quitter. If I can't keep my girl, what's the use of living?"

The old Indian fighter nodded. "Life is that away, partner. You mostly do what you can and not what you dream. Some day you'll have to marry. That's where I fell down. These days all us old stock Americans ought to marry. First you marry your job, Boss Still, then you marry a mother for your children."

Jim shook his head. "Pen's thrown me down," he said drearily.

Iron Skull waited patiently. At last Jim rose and held out his hand.

"Thank you, Williams," he said.

"Don't mention it," said Iron Skull Williams. "Glad to do it any time—that is, I ain't but—Hell, you know how I feel. Come home for some breakfast."

Before he went to work that day, Jim wrote a note to Pen.

"DEAR PENELOPE: If there is anything I can do, send for me. I can't bear to think of that occasional look of tragedy in your eyes standing for fact. I shall not get over this. Good-by, little Pen!

JIM."

Pen's answer to this reached Jim the following week.

"DEAR STILL: There is nothing you or anyone else can do. Sara and I must pay the price for our foolishness. I have learned more in the past two weeks than in all my life before. And I shall keep on learning. I can't believe that I'm only eighteen. Write to me once in a while.

PENELOPE."

This was Jim's answer:

"DEAR PEN: Uncle Denny wrote that you are to stay with him and mother and that Sara's father has arranged matters so that money pinch will not add to your burdens. We three are still mere kids in years so I suppose we shall get over our griefs to some extent. Let me keep at least a part of my old faith in you, Pen. In spite of the Hades you are destined to live through, keep that fine, sweet spirit of yours and keep that unwarped clarity of vision that belonged to the side of you, you showed me. It will help you to bear your trouble and I need this thought of you as much as Sara needs your nursing. I can't write you, Pen, but wire me if you need me.

JIM."

And then, as Iron Skull had bade him, Jim married his job.

CHAPTER IX

THE MAKON ROAD

"Always the strongest coyote makes the new trail. The pack is content to continue in the old."

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

The building of the road from the valley to the crevice edge was not a difficult task, although the country was rough. The material for making the road was at hand, for the most part, and by the end of the summer there was a broad oiled macadam road, grade carefully proportioned to grade, leading to the canyon's brim. It was a road built to withstand the wear of thousands of tons of freight that must be hauled over it.

But the throwing of the road three thousand feet down into the canyon was a more difficult matter. Here must be built through solid granite a road down which mule teams could haul all the machinery for the making of the dam and the tunnel and all the necessities for building the workingmen's camp in the canyon bottom.

It must be wide enough to safeguard life. It must be as steep as the mules could manage in order to save distance and cost. It must be strong enough to carry enormous weights. Its curves must accommodate teams of twenty mules, hauling the great length of beam and pipe needed in the work below. And it must be a road that would endure with little expense of up-keep as long as the dam below would endure.

It was not a complicated engineering feat. But it was Jim's first responsible job. It was his first experience in handling men and a camp. Moses, showing the children of Israel the way across the desert, could have felt no more pride or responsibility than did Jim breaking the trail to the Makon.

The crevice road was blasted from the granite. It was widened to hang like a shelf over sickening depths or built up with concrete to withstand the wash from some menacing gorge, or tilted to cling desperately to a blank wall that offered not even claw hold for the eagles. And always it must drop with a grade that

took no account of return freightage.

"We'll wear the machinery out and leave it at the bottom," Freet had said. "Even a 25 per cent. grade will do when necessary. Hustle it along, Manning. I'll be ready to leave the Green Mountain by the time you are ready for me at the Makon."

And Jim hustled. But labor was hard to get. The country was inaccessible and extraordinarily lonely. There was no place for women or children until the camp in the canyon should be built, so it was a crowd of wandering "rough-necks" who built the road. A few were friends of Iron Skull, who followed him from job to job. The rest were tramp workmen, men who had toiled all over the world. They were not hoboes. They were journeyman laborers. They were world workers who had lent willing and calloused hands to a thousand great labors in a thousand places.

They came and went like shifting sands. Jim never knew whether he would wake to find ten or a hundred men in the camp. He tried for a long time to solve the problem. Iron Skull considered it unsolvable. He had a low opinion of the rough-neck. At last he disappeared for a couple of weeks and returned with twenty-five Indians. They were Apaches and Mohaves under the leadership of a fine austere old Indian whom Iron Skull introduced to Jim as "Suma-theek."

"His name means 'I don't know,'" explained Williams. "It's the extent of his conversation with the average white who considers an Injun sort of a cross between a cigar sign and a nigger. Him and I did scout service together for ten years in Geronimo's time. He's my 'blood' brother, which means we've saved each other's lives. He knows more than any two whites. Color don't make no difference in wisdom, Boss Still, and I guess the Big Boss up above must have some quiet laughs at the airs the whites give themselves."

This was Jim's introduction to another friendship, though it was slow in growth. But before the Makon was finished Jim, in the long evening pipes he smoked under the stars with Suma-theek, learned the truth of Iron Skull's statements as to the Indian's wisdom.

The evening of the day the Indians arrived, a short, heavy man came to Jim's tent. He was a foreman and a good one. Jim liked his voice, which had a peculiar, tender quality, astonishing in so rough a man.

"Hello, Henderson," said Jim. "What can I do for you?"

"Us boys is going out tomorrow. We ain't going to live like Injuns!"

Jim's heart sank. He already was behind on the work. "What's the matter with the way we live?" he asked.

"Young fella," said the man pityingly, "I've worked all over the world, including New York. And I'm telling you that when you try to mix colors in camp, you've got to grade their ways of living. Now I went to Mr. Williams, but he's one of these queer nuts who thinks what's good enough for an Injun is good enough for anyone."

Jim knew that this was in truth Iron Skull's attitude. He had had no idea, however, that it might breed trouble. He thought rapidly, then spoke slowly.

"Look here, Henderson, what would you do in my place? The Director of the Service sends out word he'll be here to look the dam site over next month. I want to get the road ready for him to get down there. For six months I've tried to keep a hundred white men on the job and I can't do it. I'll give the Indians a camp of their own. But will that keep you men here?"

Henderson looked at Jim keenly to see whether or not Jim was sincerely asking his advice. Jim suddenly smiled at his evident perplexity and that flashing wistful look got under the red-faced man's skin.

"Well," he said, "if I was trying to keep men on a job I'd make things pleasant for 'em."

"You have everything I have," said Jim. "I eat with you."

"No, we ain't got all you have. We ain't got your job and your chance. You get homesick yourself even on your pay and your chance. What do you think of us boys, with nothing but wages and a kickout? Let me tell you, boss, it's the man that takes care of his men's idle hours that gets the work out of 'em."

Jim looked at the camp. It was merely a straggling line of tents set along the crevice edge. The day's work was ended and the men lounged listlessly about the tents or hung over the corral fence where the mules munched and brayed. At that moment Jim made an important stride in his education in handling men. He saw the job for the first time through the workmen's eyes. Why should they care for the job?

"Look here," said Jim, "if I send to Seattle and get a good phonograph and a

couple of billiard tables and some reading matter and set them up in a good big club tent, will you agree to keep a hundred men on the job until I finish the road?"

"Government won't pay for them," said Henderson.

"I'll pay for them myself," returned Jim. "I tell you, Henderson, this road means a lot to me. It's my—my first important job and the rest of my work on the Makon depends on it. And—and a friend of mine lost his life finding the dam site and he wanted to build this road. I feel as if I'm kind of doing his work for him. If doing something to give you boys amusement will keep you here, I'll do it gladly. I haven't anything to save my money for."

Henderson cleared his throat and looked down into the awful depths of the Makon Canyon. "I heard about that trip," he said. "If—if you feel that way about it, Mr. Manning, I guess us boys'll stand by you. And much obliged to you."

"I'm grateful to you," exclaimed Jim. "Tell the boys the stuff will be here in less than a month."

There was a noticeable change in the atmosphere of the camp after this episode. The Indians, in their own camp, were perfectly contented with their quarters and their hoop game and "kin-kan" for recreation. The phonograph and billiard tables arrived on time and were set up in the club tent and Jim and his camp began to do team work. The trouble with shifting labor disappeared except for the liquor trafficking that always hounds every camp. From dawn until dark, the canyon rang periodically with the thunder of blasts. Scoops shrieked. Mules brayed. Drivers yelled. Pick and shovel rang on granite.

Jim grew to know every inch of that granite wall. He lived on the road with the men. No detail of the job was too trivial for his attention. A more experienced man would have left more to his foremen. But Jim was new to responsibility and his nervousness drove him into an intimate contact with his workmen that was to stand him in good stead all his life. It was in building this road on the Makon that Jim learned the hearts of those who work with their hands.

When a fearful slide cost him the lives of two men and half a dozen mules, it was Jim who, in his boyish contrition and fear lest the catastrophe might have been due to his lack of foresight, insisted on first testing the wall for further danger and risked his life in doing so. When a cloudburst sent to the bottom in a half hour a concrete viaduct that had taken a month to build, it was Jim who led

the way and held the place at the head of the line of men, piling up sacks of sand lest the water take out a full half mile of the road. He dreamed of the road at night, waking again and again at the thought of some weak spot he had left unprotected.

The rough-necks felt Jim's anxiety and it proved contagious. It may have been due to many things, to Jim's youth and his simple sincerity, to his example of indefatigable energy and his willingness to work with his hands; it may have been that the men felt always the note of domination in his character and that that forced some of the cohesion. But whatever the causes, by the time the road lay a coiling thread from the top of the crevice to the spot where poor Charlie Tuck went down, Jim had built up a working machine of which many an older engineer would have been proud.

The day before the Director and Mr. Freet were expected, Jim and Iron Skull left for the railway station, twenty-five miles away, to meet their two superiors. As he mounted his horse, Jim said to Iron Skull:

"I'm a little worried about the wall at the High Point curve."

"So am I," answered Iron Skull. "Shall I blast back? I don't need to go in with you."

"No," replied Jim. "We couldn't clear out in a week. Wait till the Big Bosses go."

"Better tend to it now," warned Iron Skull.

"I'll risk it," said Jim. And he rode away, Iron Skull following.

The two were held at the little desert station for a day, waiting for the two visitors who were delayed at Green Mountain. They returned in the stage with the Director and Freet, the two saddle horses leading behind. Just about a mile outside the camp they were met by Henderson, mounted on one of the huge mules, that shone with much grooming.

The stage pulled up and Henderson dismounted and bowed.

"I come out to meet you gents," he said, in his tender voice, "representing the Charles Tuck Club of Makon, to tell you we hope you'd not try to go down the Canyon this afternoon, as us citizens of Makon had got up a few speeches and such for you."

Jim and Iron Skull were even more amazed than the two visitors, and sat staring stupidly, but the Director rose nobly to the occasion.

"Thank you," he said. "What is the Charles Tuck Club?"

Henderson mounted his mule and rode on the Director's side of the stage.

"It's the club we formed for using the phonograph and billiard tables the Boss give us. If you gents don't care, I'll ride ahead and tell 'em you're coming."

"Gee!" exclaimed Jim, as the mule disappeared up the broad ribbon of road. "What do you suppose they are up to?"

"This is going some for a small camp!" said the Director. "The men usually don't care whether I come or go."

Jim shook his head. They reached the camp shortly after Henderson and were led by that gentleman to the club tent, where fully half the camp was gathered. The phonograph was set to going as they came in and following this, Baxter, the orator of the camp, got up and made a speech of welcome that consumed fifteen minutes of time and his entire vocabulary. It was concerned mostly with praises of Jim and his work with the men. When he had finished, the phonograph gave them "America" by a very determined male quartet. The perspiring Henderson then led them to the mess tent, where a late dinner or an early supper was set forth that had taxed the resources of the desert camp to its utmost.

It was dusk when the meal was finished, and then and then only did Henderson allow Iron Skull to lead the visitors to their tents while he took Jim by the arm and drew him to the crevice edge.

"Boss," he said, "not half an hour after you left, the whole dod dinged wall on the High Point curve slid out. Well, sir, we all know'd there'd be hell to pay for you if the two Big Bosses come and see that. We couldn't stand for it after all you'd worried over it. We fixed up three shifts. It's moonlight and, say, if we didn't push the face off that slide! Old Suma-theek, why he never let his Injuns sleep! They worked three shifts. Even at that you'd a beat us to it if we hadn't thought of this here committee of welcome deal. If I do say it, I've mixed with good people in my time. We kept the big mitts in there and one of the Injuns just brought me word the road was clear."

Jim stared at his rough-neck friend for a minute, too moved to speak. Then he held out his hand.

"Henderson, you've saved me a big mortification. I knew that wall should have been blasted back. Gee! Henderson! I'll remember this!"

"You're welcome," replied Henderson gently. "Don't let on to anyone but Williams and us fellows is mum."

And so the Director made his trip down and up the Makon Road and praised much the forethought and care that Jim had expended on it. And Jim, because the secret meant so much to his men, did not tell of their devotion until the Director had gone and Arthur Freet was established on the job. And after he had heard the story Freet said, looking at Jim keenly:

"You know what that kind of carelessness deserves, Manning?"

Jim nodded and Freet laughed at his serious face. "Pshaw, boy! Your having gotten together an organization with that sort of motive power would offset worse carelessness than that. Get ready to shove them into the tunnel."

So Jim's rough-necks began to open the tunnel.

The Makon Project was a six years' job. Freet gave Jim a chance at every angle of the work. Jim admired his chief ardently and yet the two never grew confidential. Freet, in fact, had no confidants among the government employees, but he seemed to know a great many of the politicians of the valley and of the state. And when he was not too deeply immersed in the work at hand Jim felt vaguely troubled by this.

And the problems of actual construction were so many that the dam and tunnel were completed and Jim had begun work on the ditches before he realized that there was a whole group of questions he must face that had nothing to do with technical engineering.

For the first mile the tunnel had to be driven through solid granite. Then the way led through adobe hills, so soft that the sagging walls were a constant menace. Not until six workmen had died at the job was the adobe finally sealed with concrete. After the adobe came sand, spring riddled. More rough-necks gave up their lives fighting the gushing floods and falling walls, until at last the tunnel emerged into the open foothills of the valley.

During all this time, the men for whom Jim had spent his first savings stayed solidly by him, save those whom death called out. After the camp in the canyon was built, many of them, including Henderson, developed unsuspected families

and Jim became godfather to several namesakes. After the road was finished, however, old Suma-theek had to take his braves back to the Apache country. They did not like the work in the tunnel, and it was several years before Jim saw his old friend again.

Uncle Denny and Jim's mother came out to visit him, his second summer on the dam, and they enjoyed their visit so much that it became a yearly custom.

Jim's mother, with a mother's wisdom, never spoke of Pen to Jim except casually, of her health or of Sara's effort to carry on real estate business through Pen and his father. On the first visit Uncle Denny undertook to tell Jim of how the accident had developed all the latent ugliness of Sara's character and of his heavy demands on Penelope's strength and time. And he told Jim how Pen's girlishness had disappeared, leaving behind a woman so sweet, so patient, so sadly wise, that Uncle Denny could not speak of her without his voice breaking.

But Uncle Denny never repeated this recital, for before he had finished, Jim, white-lipped, had said hoarsely, "Uncle Denny, I can't stand it! I can't!" and had rushed off into the desert night.

Even Uncle Denny could not know, as Iron Skull who had lived with him for the past years knew, of Jim's silent anguish in the loss of Penelope. There was a little picture of Pen in tennis clothes at sixteen that always was pinned to Jim's tent wall. Once in a while when Iron Skull found him looking at it, Jim would tell him of Pen's beauty. But other than this he never mentioned her name to anyone.

Under the excitement of what Uncle Denny told him, Jim wrote a note to Pen:

"DEAR LITTLE PEN: This desert country claims one's soul as well as one's body. It is as big as the hand of God. If life gets too much for you in New York, come to me here, and I will show you and the desert to each other.

JIM."

And though Pen did not answer the note she carried it next her heart for many a day.

After the tunnel was delivering water to the valley, Jim moved into the valley with his henchmen and took charge of the canal building. Not until he undertook this work did he realize that there were economic features connected with the work on the Projects that were baffling and irritating.

The conditions in the valley were complex. A small portion of it had been farmed for many years. These farmers felt that the canals ought to come to them first. As soon as it had become known that the Reclamation Service was to undertake the Makon project, real estate sharks had gotten control of much land and by misinforming advertisements had induced eastern people to buy farms in the valley.

Other people, sometimes farmers, oftener folk who had failed in every other line of business, took up land long before even the road to the dam was finished. These people waited in a pitiful state of hardship five years for water. They blamed the Service and they fought for first water.

There were Land Hogs in the valley; men who by illegal means had acquired thousands of acres of land, although the law allowed them but one hundred and sixty acres. After the Project was nearing completion these Land Hogs sold parcels of their land at inflated prices. The Land Hogs were wealthy and had influence in the community. They threatened trouble if canals were not built first to them.

Jim turned a deaf ear to all the contending forces. His reply was the same to each:

"There is just one way to build a canal and that is where, influenced only by the lie of the land, it will do the greatest good to the greatest number. I'm an engineer, not a politician. Get out and let me work."

Yet for all his deaf ear, there percolated to Jim's inner mind facts and insinuations that disturbed him. Day after day there poured into his office not only complaints about the actual work, but accusations of graft. "The Service was working for the rich men of the valley." "The Service had its hand behind its back." "The Service was extravagant and wasteful of the people's money." "Every cent that the Project cost must be paid back by the farmers. What right had the Service to make mistakes?"

In all the cloud of complaints, Jim maintained a persistent silence and placed his canals without fear or favor. One morning in March, it was Jim's fifth year on the Makon, Mr. Freet sent for him.

"Manning," he said, as Jim dropped off his horse and stood in the doorway, "how about the canal through Mellin's place?"

Jim tossed his hair back from his face and lighted a cigarette. "Mellin, the Land Hog?" he asked. "Well, his canal's like the apple core. There ain't going to be one!"

Freet's small black eyes met Jim's clear gaze levelly. "Why?" he asked.

Jim looked surprised. "Why, you know, Mr. Freet, that to run it through Mellin's place will cost $5,000 more and will force half a dozen farmers to double the length of their ditches. The lie of the canal in relation to grade, too, is a half mile east of Mellin's place."

Arthur Freet raised his eyebrows. "I think that the canal had better go through Mellin's place."

Jim drew a quick breath. There was silence in the little sheet iron office for a moment and then Jim said, "I can't do it, Mr. Freet."

"This is not a matter for you to decide, Manning," replied Freet. "A man in my position has more to consider in building a dam than the mere engineering 'best.' I must think of the tactful thing, the thing that will save the Service trouble. Mellin has pull with Congress, enough to start an investigation."

"Let them investigate!" cried Jim. "I'd like them to see what I call some darn good engineering! I do think you got soaked on some of the contract work, though. Those permanent caretakers' houses could have been built for half the price."

Freet raised his eyebrows. "Put the canal through Mellin's place, Manning."

Jim flushed. "I can't do it! The west canal had to go through that Land Hog Howard's place, I'm sorry to say. It was the cheapest and best site. Every farmer in the valley dressed me down about it, in person and by mail. But I haven't cared! It was the right thing. But nothing doing on Mellin's place."

Freet smiled a little. "Do you want me to go over your head?"

Jim gave him a clear look. "You can have my resignation whenever you want it, Mr. Freet."

And Jim mounted and rode heavily back to his office.

CHAPTER X

THE STRENGTH OF THE PACK

"The lone hunter finds the best hunting but he must fight and die alone."

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

That night, when Iron Skull Williams stopped at Jim's tent to speak of some detail of the work, Jim told him about the conversation with Freet.

"Iron Skull," he said in closing, "if I've got to mix up in politics, I'll quit, that's all. It's not my idea of engineering. My heavens! If the engineers of the country are not going to be left unsmirched to do their work, what's going to become of civilization? You know how I've always admired Arthur Freet. You know how I appreciate the chances he's given me to get ahead. And now——"

Iron Skull grunted. "I guess he hasn't hurt his own reputation any by letting you do a lot of his work for him while he played another end of the game. You are a great pipe dreamer, Boss Still. You want to remember that the Service is made up of human beings."

"Do you mean there *is* graft in the Service?" asked Jim sharply.

The older man answered gently, for he knew he was hurting Jim. "The Service is the cleanest bureau in the government. I'll bet you can count on one hand the men in it who don't toe quite straight."

Jim drew a quick breath. "I don't believe there is a crook in the Service."

"How about the sale of the water power up at Green Mountain?" asked Williams. "Do you think that was an open deal? Did the farmers have their chance?"

Jim flushed. "I never let myself think about it," he muttered.

Iron Skull nodded. "You've lived in a fool's paradise, Boss Still, and I for one don't see that you help the Service by shutting your eyes. You know as well as I do that the United States Reclamation Service is developing some mighty important water power propositions. Do you think it's like poor old human

nature to argue that the Water Power Trust ain't going to get hold of that power if it can or try to destroy the Service if it can't?"

Jim rubbed his forehead drearily. "Iron Skull, isn't there anything a fellow can keep his faith in?"

"Pshaw!" answered Williams, "you can keep your faith in the Service! This here is just like finding out that, though your wife is a mighty fine woman, she has her weak points!"

Jim stared at the lamp for a long time.

"What you looking at, partner?" asked Iron Skull.

"Oh, I was seeing the Green Mountain dam the way I first saw it and I was seeing Charlie Tuck and those days of ours in the canyon and thinking of what he said about the Service. He believed in it the way I have. And then I was thinking about the bunch of men who've stuck together and by me for five years, like a pack of wolves, by jove! And I was thinking of those lines, you know, 'The strength of the pack is the wolf and the strength of the wolf is the pack.' That is what the Service ought to be like, the Pack, and if one man goes bad the strength of the pack is hurt."

The older man nodded. Then he said, "What are you going to do about it all, Boss Still?"

Jim brought his fist down on the table. "I'm an engineer. I deal with hard facts, not intrigues. Freet must take me so or not at all."

"Well, you are half right and half wrong," commented Iron Skull, rising.

"What do you mean?" asked Jim.

"I mean that you have got an awful lot to learn yet before you will be of big value to the Service, but you've got to learn it with your elbows and sweating blood. You're that kind. Nothing I can say will help you. Good night, partner!"

The next morning Jim reported at Freet's office. "Mr. Freet," he said carefully, "I have a lot of pride in the reputation of the Reclamation Service. If we put a canal through Mellin's place it'll give people a real cause for complaint. I shall have to resign if you insist on my doing it."

Freet laughed sardonically. "The Service can't afford to lose you, even if you do

live in the clouds! Why, I broke you in myself, Manning, and you are one of the best men in the Service today, bar none. We will let the Mellin matter rest for a while."

Jim blushed furiously under his chief's praise and with a brief "Thank you," he turned away.

It was a little over two months later that Jim received an order from Washington to proceed to the Cabillo Project in the Southwest. The engineer in charge there was in poor health and Jim was to act as his assistant. Jim was torn between pleasure at his promotion and displeasure over Freet's obvious purpose of getting him away from the Makon.

But the utter relief in not having to fight the Mellin matter to a finish triumphed over the displeasure and Jim left the Makon for the Southwest with Iron Skull, while trailing after him came the Pack who, to a man, suddenly felt an overwhelming desire to winter in the desert.

Jim missed the Makon very much at first. He had all the love of a father for his first born for the Project, for which Charlie Tuck had died. At first, he felt very much a stranger on this new Project. Watts, the engineer in charge, was a sick man. He was a gentle, lovable fellow of fifty, and he was taking very much to heart the heckling that the Service was receiving on his Project. His illness had caused the work on the dam to fall behind. Jim closed his ears and his mouth, placed Iron Skull and his Pack judiciously on the works and started full steam ahead to build the Cabillo dam.

Six months after Jim's arrival Watts died and Jim succeeded to his job, which day by day grew more complicated. The old simple life of the Makon when, heading his faithful rough-necks, Jim ate up the work, with no thought save for the work, was gone. Jim's job on the Cabillo was not that of engineer alone. He had not only to build the dam but to rule an organization of two thousand souls. He was sole ruler of an isolated desert community and he was the buffer between the office at Washington and all the contending and jealous forces that were rapidly developing in the valley.

The United States Reclamation Service is in the Department of the Interior. Jim had been at Cabillo two years when the new Secretary of the Interior summoned him to Washington.

The new Secretary had found his office flooded with complaints about the

Reclamation Service. He had found, too, a report from the Congressional Committee which had the year before investigated several of the Projects. Being of a patient and inquiring turn of mind, the Secretary had decided to go to the heart of the matter. Therefore he invited the complainants to come to Washington to see him. He summoned the Director and Jim with several other of the Project engineers, Arthur Freet among them, to appear before him, with the complainants.

May in Washington is apt to be very warm, although very lovely to look upon. Jim, so long accustomed to the naked height and sweep of the desert country, felt half suffocated by the low hot streets of the capitol. He went directly from the train to the Hearing, which was held in one of the Secretary's offices. The room was large and square, with a desk at one end, where the Secretary was sitting. When Jim entered, the place already was filled to overflowing with irrigation farmers or their lawyers, with land speculators, with Congressmen and reporters.

The Secretary was a large man with a smooth shaven, inscrutable face and blue eyes that were set far apart under overhanging brows. He looked at Jim keenly as the young engineer made his way to his seat in the front of the room. He saw the same Jim that had said good-bye to the little group in the station eight years before; the same Jim, with some important modifications.

He was tanned to bronze, of course. He had sun wrinkles at the corners of his eyes. His mouth was thinner and the corners not so deep. The old scowl between his eyes had traced two permanent lines there. The mass of brown hair still swept his dreamer's forehead. His jaws had become the jaws of a man of action.

Jim sat down, folded his arms and crossed his knees, fixing his gaze on the patch of blue sky above the building opposite the open window. For five days he sat so, without answering a charge that was brought against him.

For five days the Secretary sat with entire patience urging every man to speak his mind fully and freely. And if bitterness toward the Service betokened free speaking, the complainants held back nothing.

A heavy set man, tanned and cheaply dressed, said: "Mr. Secretary, I was born in Hungary. I am a tinner by trade. I lived in Sioux City. I have a wife and six children. I got consumption and a real estate man fixed it up with a friend of his on the Makon Project that I go out there, see? It took all I saved but they told me crops the first year will pay all my living expenses. I buy forty acres.

"Mr. Secretary, I get no crops for five years. I hauled every drop of water we use seven miles from a spring for five years. Some days we got nothing to eat. Me and my oldest boy, we work for Mellin when we can and we stayed alive till the water come. I get cured of my consumption. But my money is gone. I can buy no tools, no nothing. And, Mr. Secretary, when the canal do come they run it through Mellin's place. My money is gone and I can't afford to dig the long ditch to Mellin's. Mellin's place is green and mine is still desert."

"Are there no small farmers or settlers who are succeeding on the Makon Project?" asked the Secretary.

"Yes, sir," replied the man, "many, but also, many like me."

"Then is your complaint against the real estate sharks or the government?" persisted the Secretary.

"Against both!" cried the man. "Why did that Freet give Mellin and the other big fellow first choice in everything? Why must I pay for what I can't get?"

There were several farmers from different projects who had stories that matched the ex-tinner's. When they had finished, the Secretary called on a real estate man who had come with a protest about the running of the canals on the Makon.

"What was the net value of the crops on the Makon Project last year," asked the Secretary.

"About $500,000, I think."

"What was it, say the year before the Reclamation Service went in there?"

"Perhaps $100,000."

"We are to believe, then, that some people have found the Service useful?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Secretary, there are a whole lot of contented farmers up there who are too busy with their bumper crops to come to Washington, even if they wanted to."

The real estate man sat down and the Secretary called on the Chairman of the Congressional investigating committee to make a brief summary of his charges.

The Chairman said, succinctly: "I charge the Service with graft, gross extravagance and inefficiency. I call on you to remove the Director and four of

his engineers, including Arthur Freet and James Manning, who are present."

"Of what specific things do you accuse Mr. Manning?" asked the Secretary, with a glance at Jim's impassive face.

"His Project is full of mistakes, some of them small, that, nevertheless, aggregate big and show the trend of the Service. Up on the Makon he made a road at a cost of a hundred thousand dollars that only the Service used. He's put a thousand dollars into telephone booths where two hundred would have been ample. Some of the canal concrete work has had to be dynamited out and done over and over again. The farmer pays for all this. Manning refuses to take any advice from the farmers on the Project, men who were irrigating before he was born. His every idea seems hostile to the farmer, whose land the farmer himself is paying him to irrigate. Manning was trained by Freet, Mr. Secretary."

The Secretary tapped his desk softly for several moments, as if turning over in his mind the opposing evidence brought out during the several days of the Hearing. Jim had not been called on but Arthur Freet and two other Project engineers had spent an entire day on the stand, quizzed unmercifully by everyone in the room. They had disclaimed every accusation. The Director of the Service, a quiet man of marvelous executive ability, had made a bitter return attack on the Congressional Committee, the farmers, the real estate men and the lawyers, accusing them of being the conscious or unconscious tools of the Water Power Trust, whose object was to destroy the Service.

An elderly Senator had risen and had addressed the Hearing. "I was one of the fathers of the Reclamation Act. One of the fundamental ideas of the Act was that it was not governmental charity but that every farmer whose arid acres were watered would be willing to pay for it. I see but one thing in all these protests against the Service and that is the attempt to repudiate the debt incurred by the farmers to the Service. And the attempt to repudiate is most bitter with the very men who pleaded most loudly with the Government to irrigate their land and who voluntarily pledged themselves to pay back during an easy period of years the cost of the Projects. If it is a fact that this tainted idea of Repudiation is creeping among the land owners on the Projects, I warn you all that I shall use all my influence to have the Reclamation Act repealed."

As the old Senator had finished half the men in the room had risen to their feet, angrily denying any thought of repudiation.

Now, after tapping his desk thoughtfully, the Secretary looked at Jim.

"Mr. Manning, please take the stand."

Jim unfolded his long legs and strode up beside the Secretary's desk. He stood there struggling for words that would not come. For five days he had sat thinking of the three Projects that he knew. He recalled Charlie Tuck and the two other engineers who had laid down their lives for the dams. He pictured again the drowned and mangled workmen at the cost of whose lives the Makon tunnel had been driven. A slow, bitter anger had risen in him against Freet. It seemed to Jim a fearful thing that one crooked man could taint such faithfulness and sacrifice as he had known, could blind intelligent men to the marvel of engineering work that marked the progress of the Reclamation Service through the arid country. But when Jim's words came, they were futile.

"I don't know," he said in his father's casual drawl, "that I have anything to say to the specific charges against me. The Director has covered the ground better than I can. I have the feeling that if the actual work we have done out west, the actual acreage we have brought to profitable bearing won't speak to you people who have seen it, nothing else will. The flood season is coming on, Mr. Secretary. I would suggest that you send either me or my successor out to my dam."

The Secretary's face was quite as inscrutable as Jim's. "Mr. Manning, why do you put so much money into roads?"

Jim's eyes fired a little. "I believe that one of the functions of government is to build good roads. Actually, the heavy freightage that must pass over these roads makes it essential that they be first class. A cheap road would be expensive in time and breakage."

"How about the accusations of mismanagement?"

"I have made mistakes," replied Jim, "and some of them have been expensive ones in lives and money. Many of our engineering problems are entirely new and we have to solve them without precedent. The punishment for a bad guess in engineering is always sure and hard. One can make a bad political guess and escape."

"How about the accusation of graft?" continued the Secretary.

Jim whitened a little. He looked over the Secretary's head out at the patch of blue sky and then back at the room full of hostile faces.

"If any man in the Service," he said slowly, "can be shown to be dishonest, no

punishment can be too severe for him." Jim paused and then went on, half under his breath as if he had forgotten his audience. "The strength of the pack is the wolf. It's disloyalty in the pack that's helping the old American spirit down hill."

The Secretary's eyes deepened but he repeated, quietly, "And as to *your* graft, Mr. Manning?"

Jim hesitated and whitened again under his bronze. If ever a man looked guilty, Jim did.

There was at this point a sudden scraping of a chair, the clatter of an overturned cuspidor and a stout, elderly man at the rear of the room jumped to his feet.

"Mr. Secretary," he cried, "may I say a word?"

"Who are you?" asked the Secretary.

"I'm a New York lawyer, but I know the Projects like the back of me hand. And I know Jim Manning as I know me own soul. You've let everyone have free speech here. Manning didn't know till this minute that I was in town. My name is Michael Dennis, your honor."

The Secretary smiled ever so slightly as he glanced from Jim's face to that of the speaker. Jim's jaw was dropped. He was shaking his head furiously at Uncle Denny while the latter nodded as furiously at Jim.

"Mr. Manning seems unwilling to speak for himself. Since you know him so well, Mr. Dennis, we'll hear what you have to say. You may be seated, Mr. Manning."

Jim moved back to his place reluctantly and Uncle Denny made his way to the front, talking as he went.

"Of course, he won't speak for himself, Mr. Secretary. He never could. Still Jim we call him. Still Jim they name him on all the Projects and Still Jim he is here before this crowd of mixed jackals and jackasses. He never could waste his energy in speech, as I'm doing now. I've often thought he had some fine inner sense that taught him even as a child that if it's hard to speak truth, its next to impossible to hear it. So he just keeps still.

"You've heard him accused of graft, Mr. Secretary, and of inefficiency and of any other black phrase that came handy to these people. Your honor, it's impossible!

It's not in his breed of mind! If you could have seen him as I have! A child of fifteen working in the pit of a skyscraper and crying himself to sleep nights for memory of his father he'd seen killed at like work, yet refusing money from me till I married his mother and made him take it. If you had seen him out on your Projects, cutting himself off from civilization in the flower of his youth and giving his young life blood to his dams! I know he's received offers of five times his salary from a corporation and stayed by his dam. I've seen him hang by a frayed cable with the flood round his arm pits, arguing, heartening the rough-necks for twenty-four hours at a stretch, the last man to give in, for his dam! I've seen him take chances that meant life or death for him and a hundred workmen and ten thousand dollars worth of material and win for his dam, for a pile of stones that was to bring money to the very men here who are howling him down. For his dam, that's wife and child to him, and they accuse him of prostituting it! Bah! You fools! Don't you know no money-getter works that way? He's a trail builder, Mr. Secretary. He's the breed that opens the way for idiots like these and they follow in and trample him underfoot on the very trail he has made for them!"

Uncle Denny stopped. There was a moment's hush in the room. Jim watched the patch of blue with unseeing eyes. As Uncle Denny started back to his seat there rose an angry buzz, but the Secretary raised his hand.

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen! Turn about is fair play. Remember that you have called the Reclamation Engineers some very foul names. Mr. Manning, I cannot see why you should not return to the flood at your dam and you other engineers to your respective posts, there to await word from your Director as to the results of this Hearing. You yourselves must realize after hearing all sides that I can take action only after careful deliberation. I thank you all for your frankness and patience with me."

As the room cleared, Uncle Denny puffed down on Jim. "Still Jim, me boy, don't be sore at me. I should have spoken if I'd been a deaf mute!"

Jim took Uncle Denny's hands. "Uncle Denny! Uncle Denny! You shouldn't have done it, yet how can I be sore at you!"

"That's right," said Uncle Denny. "You can't be! Oh, I tell you, I feel about you as I do about Ireland! I'm aching for some blundering fool to say something that I may knock his block off! When are you going back?"

"Tonight," replied Jim. "Come up to the hotel and talk while I pack. I can't wait

an hour on the flood. How are mother and Pen?"

"Fine! Your mother and I are the most comfortable couple on earth. We took it for granted you'd come up to New York. You got me letter about Sara and Pen before you left the dam, didn't you?"

"No. What letter?" asked Jim.

The two were walking up to the hotel now. Uncle Denny threw up both his hands. "Soul of me soul! They are out there by now. It all happened very unexpectedly and I did me best to head him off. I must admit Pen was no help to me there."

"But what——" exclaimed Jim.

Uncle Denny interrupted. "I don't know, meself. You gave Sara's name to Freet some time ago, two years ago, when he wanted to do some real estate business in New York. Well, ever since Sara has had the western land speculation bug, and lately nothing would do but he must get out to your Project. They are waiting there now for you if Sara killed no one en route. There is so much peace in the old brownstone front now, Still Jim, that your mother and I fear we will have to keep a coyote in the parlor to howl us to sleep!"

Jim turned a curiously shaken face on Dennis. "Do you mean that Pen, *Pen* is out at the Dam? That she will be there when I get back?"

Uncle Denny nodded. "Pen and *Sara*! Don't forget Sara. Me heart misgives me as to his purpose in going."

"Penelope at my dam?" repeated Jim.

Uncle Denny looked at Jim's tanned face. Then he looked away and his Irish eyes were tear-dimmed. He said no more until they were in Jim's room at the hotel. Jim began to pack rapidly and Uncle Denny remarked, casually:

"Penelope is Saradokis' wife, you know."

Jim's drawl was razor-edged. "Uncle Denny, she never was and never will be Saradokis' wife."

"Oh, I know! Only in name! But—I may as well tell you that I think she was unwise in going to you."

Jim walked over to the window, then slowly back again. His clear gray eyes searched the kindly blue ones. "Uncle Denny, why do you suppose this thing happened to Pen?"

The Irishman's voice was a little husky as he answered: "To make a grand woman of her. She's developed qualities that nothing else on earth could have developed in her. It's because of her having grown to be what she is that I didn't want her to go to you. I—Oh, Still Jim, me boy! Me boy!"

For just a moment Jim's lips quivered, then he said, "We shall see what the desert does for us," and he closed his suitcase with a snap.

CHAPTER XI

OLD JEZEBEL ON THE RAMPAGE

"Old Jezebel is a woman. For years she keeps her appointed trail until the accumulation of her strength breaks all bounds and she sweeps sand and men before her."

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

There is a butte in the Cabillo country that they call the Elephant.

Picture a country of lavenders and yellows and blues; an open, barren land, with now a wide sweep of desert, now a chaos of mesa and mountain, dead volcano and eroded plain. The desert, a buff yellow where blue distance and black shadow and the purple of volcano spill have not stained it. The mountains, bronze and lavender, lifting scarred peaks to a quiet sky; a sky of turquoise blue. The Rio del Norte, a brown streak, forcing a difficult and roundabout course through ranges and desert.

In a rough desert plain, which is surrounded by ranges, stands a broad backed butte that was once a volcano. The Rio del Norte sweeps in a curve about its base. Time and volcanic crumblings and desert wind have carved the great beast into the semblance of an elephant at rest. The giant head is slightly bowed. The curved trunk droops, but the eyes are wide open and the ears are slightly lifted. By day it is a rich, red bronze. By night, a purple that deepens to black. Watching, brooding, listening, day or night, the butte dominates here the desert and the river and the ranges.

This is the butte that they call the Elephant.

Below this butte the Service was building a dam. It was a huge undertaking. When finished the dam would be as high as a twenty-story building and as long as two city blocks. It would block the river, turning it into a lake forty miles long, that would be a perpetual water supply to over a hundred thousand acres of land in the Rio del Norte valley.

The borders of the Rio del Norte have been cultivated for centuries. Long before

the Puritans landed in New England, the Spanish who followed Coronado planted grape vines on the brown river's banks. The Spanish found Pueblo Indians irrigating little hard-won fields here. The irrigation ditches these Indians used were of dateless antiquity and yet there were traces left of still older ditches used by a people who had gone, leaving behind them only these pitiful dumb traces of heroic human effort. After the Spanish came the Americans, patrolling their ditches with guns lest the Apaches devastate their fields.

Spanish, Indians, Americans all fought to bring the treacherous Rio del Norte under control, but failure came so often that at last they united in begging the Reclamation Service for aid. It was to help these people and to open up the untouched lands of the valley as well, that the dam was being built. And the building of it was Jim's job.

Jim jumped off the bobtailed train that obligingly stopped for him at a lone shed in the wide desert. In the shed was the adobe splashed automobile which Jim had left there on his trip out. He threw his suit case into the tonneau, cranked the engine and was off over the rough trail that led to the Project Road.

A few miles out he met four hoboes. They turned out for the machine and Jim stopped.

"Looking for work at the dam?" he asked.

"What are the chances?" asked one of the group.

"Fine! Get in! I'm engineer up there. You're hired."

With broad grins the three clambered aboard. The man who sat beside Jim said: "We heard flood season was coming on and thought you'd like extra help. Us boys rode the bumpers up from Cabillo."

Jim grunted. Labor-getting continued to be a constant problem for all the valuable nucleus formed by the Park. Experts and the offscourings of the earth drifted to the great government camp and Jim and all his assistants exercised a constant and rigid sifting process. He did not talk much to his new help. His eyes were keen to catch the first glimpse of the river. The men caught his strain and none of them spoke again. Cottontails quivered out of sight as the automobile rushed on. An occasional coyote, silhouetted against the sky, disappeared as if by magic. Swooping buzzards hung motionless to see, then swept on into the heavens.

Jim was taking right-angled curves at twenty-five miles an hour. The hoboes clung to the machine wild-eyed and speechless. Up and up, round a twisted peak and then, far below, the river.

"She's up! The old Jezebel!" said Jim.

The machine slid down the mountainside to the government bridge. The brown water was just beginning to wash over the floor. Across the bridge, Jim stopped the machine before a long gray adobe building. It topped a wide street of tents. Jim scrawled a line on an old envelope and gave it to one of the hoboes.

"Take that to the steward. Eat all you can hold and report wherever the steward sends you."

Then he went on. Regardless of turn or precipice the road rose in a steady grade from the lower camp where the workmen lived, a half mile to the dam site. Jim whirled to the foot of the cable way towers and jumped out of the machine.

The dam site lay in a valley, a quarter of a mile wide, between two mountains. Above the dam lay the Elephant. A great cofferdam built near the Elephant's base diverted the river into a concrete flume that ran along the foot of one of the mountains. The river bed, bared by the diverting of the stream, was filled with machinery. An excavation sixty feet below the river bottom and two hundred feet wide was almost completed. Indeed, on the side next the flume there already rose above the river bed a mighty square of concrete, a third the width of the river. Jim had begun the actual erection of the dam.

The two mountains were topped by huge towers, supporting cables that swung above the dam site. The cables carried anything from a man to a locomotive, from the "grab buckets" that bit two tons of sand at a mouthful from the excavation, to a skid bearing a motion picture outfit.

Work was going on as usual when Jim arrived. The cable ways sang and shrieked. The concrete mixer roared. Donkey engines puffed and dinkees squealed. Jim dashed into a telephone booth and called up the office.

"This is Mr. Manning. Where is Williams?"

The telephone girl answered quickly: "Oh, how are you, Mr. Manning? We're glad you are back. Why, Mr. Williams was called down to Cabillo to make a deposition for the Washington hearing, several days ago. And they made Mr. Barton and Mr. Arles go, too. I'm trying to get them on long distance now. You

came by the way of Albuquerque, didn't you? We tried to reach you in Washington, but couldn't."

Jim groaned. His three best men were gone.

"We didn't expect high water for a week," the girl went on, "or else——"

"Miss Agnes," Jim interrupted, "call up every engineer on the job and tell them to report at once to me at Booth A. Whom did Iron Skull leave on his job?"

"Benson, the head draughtsman."

Jim hung up the receiver and stood a moment in thought. Iron Skull was now Jim's superintendent and right hand. His mechanical and electrical engineers were gone, too, leaving only cubs who had never seen a flood. Benson came running down the trail from the office.

"For the Lord's sake, Benson, have you been asleep?" said Jim.

Benson looked at the roaring flume. "She'll carry it all right, don't you think? I haven't been able to get in touch with the hydrographer for twenty-four hours. The water only began to rise an hour ago."

"The poor kid may be drowned!" exclaimed Jim. He turned to the group of men forming about him. "We're in for a fight, fellows. This flood has just begun and it's higher now than I've ever seen the water in the flume. I'm going to fill the excavation with water from the flume and so avoid the wash from the main flow. Save what you can from the river bed. Leave the excavation to me."

Five minutes later the river bed swarmed with workmen. The cable ways groaned with load after load of machinery. Jim ran down the trail, around the excavation and up onto the great block of concrete. The top of this was just below the flume edge. The foreman of the concrete gang was aghast at Jim's orders.

"We may have a couple of hours," Jim finished, "or she may come down on us as if the bottom had dropped out of the ocean. See that everyone gets out of the excavation."

The foreman looked a little pitifully at the concrete section.

"That last pouring'll go out like a snow bank, Mr. Manning."

Jim nodded. "Dam builders luck, Fritz. Get busy." He hurried into a telephone booth, even in the stress of the moment smiling ruefully as he remembered the complaint at the hearing. The booths *had* been too well built. Jim's predecessor had been a government man of the old school in just one particular. Honest to his heart's core, he still could not understand the need of economy when working for Uncle Sam.

"Have you heard from Iron Skull?" Jim asked the operator.

"He ought to be here now, Mr. Manning," she replied. "I sent the car over to the kitchen."

"You are all right, Miss Agnes," said Jim. "Tell Dr. Emmet to be near the telephone. I don't like the looks of this."

Jim hung up the receiver, pulled off his coat and hurried out to the edge of the concrete section. A derrick was being spun along the cableway, just above the excavation. A man was standing on the great hook from which the derrick was suspended. Men were clambering through the heavy sand up out of the excavation. The man on the edge of the pit who was holding the guide rope attached to the swinging derrick was caught in the rush of workmen. He tripped and dropped the rope, then ran after it with a shout of warning. For a moment the derrick spun awkwardly.

The man in the tower rang a hasty signal and the operator of the cableway reversed with a sudden jerk that threw the derrick from the hook. The man on the hook clung like a fly on a thread. The derrick crashed heavily down on the excavation edge, and slid to the bottom, carrying with it a great sand slide that caught two men as it went.

Jim gasped, "My God! I hate a derrick!" and ran down into the excavation, the foreman at his heels. Men turned in their tracks and wallowed back after Jim.

The derrick had fallen in such a way that its broken boom held back a portion of the slide. From under the boom protruded a brown hand with almond-shaped nails; unmistakably the hand of an Indian. The least movement of the boom would send the sand down over the wreckage of the derrick.

Uncontrollably moved for a moment, Jim dropped to his knees and crawled close to touch the inert hand. "Don't move!" he shouted. "We will get you out!" For just a moment, an elm shaded street and a dismantled mansion flashed across

his vision. Then he got a grip on himself and crawled out.

"Get a bunch of men with shovels!" he cried. "Dig as if you were digging in dynamite."

"They are dead under there, Boss!" pleaded the foreman. "And they ain't nothing but an Injun and a Mexican, an ornery *hombre*! And if you don't let the flume in this whole place'll wash out like flour. It'll take an hour to get them out."

Jim's lips tightened. "You weren't up on the Makon, Fritz. My rule is, fight to save a life at any cost. Keep those fellows digging like the devil."

He hurried back up onto the section, thence up to the flume edge. Then he gave an exclamation. The brown water had risen an inch while he was in the excavation. He ran for the telephone again.

In a moment a new form of activity began in the river bed. Every man who was not digging gingerly at the sand slide was turned to throwing bags of sand on cofferdam and flume edge to hold back the river as long as might be. Jim stood on the concrete section and issued his orders. His voice was steel cool. His orders came rapidly but without confusion. He concentrated every force of his mind on driving his army of workmen to the limit of their strength, yet on keeping them cool headed that every moment might count.

It was an uneven fight at that. Old Jezebel gathered strength minute by minute. The brown water was dripping over onto the concrete when someone caught Jim's arm.

"Where shall I go, Boss Still?"

"Thank God, Iron Skull!" exclaimed Jim. "Go down and get that *hombre* and Apache out."

Iron Skull ran down into the excavation. The brown water began to seep over the edge of the pit. The men who were digging above the slide swore and threw down their shovels. Jim tossed his megaphone to the cement engineer and ran to meet the men.

"Get back there," he said quietly. The men looked at his face, then turned sheepishly back.

Jim picked up a shovel. Iron Skull already was digging like a madman.

One of the workmen, who never had ceased digging, snarled to another: "What does he want to let the whole dam go to hell for two nigger rough-necks for?"

"Bosses' rule," panted the other. "Up on the Makon we'd risk our lives to the limit and fight for the other fellows just as quick. How'd you like to be under there? Never know who's turn's next!"

The brown water rose steadily, running faster and faster over into the excavation. The water was touching the brown hand which now twitched and writhed, when Jim said:

"Now, boys, catch the cable hook to the boom and give the signal."

The derrick swung up into the air. Jim and a Makon man seized the Indian, Iron Skull and another man the *hombre*. Both of them were alive but helpless. The cement engineer shouted an order through the megaphone and just as a lifting brown wave showed its fearful head beyond the Elephant, the river bed was cleared of human beings.

Up around the cable tower foot was gathered a great crowd of workmen, women and children. Jim, greeted right and left as he relinquished his burden, looked about eagerly. Penelope must have heard of the flood and have come to see it. But surrounded by his friends, Jim missed the girlish figure that had hovered on the outskirts of the crowd and that, after he had reached the tower foot in safety, disappeared up the trail.

Jim, with his arm across Iron Skull's shoulder, turned to watch the river. The moving brown wall had filled the excavation. It rushed like a Niagara over the flume edge. In half an hour it ran from bank to bank, with a roar of satisfaction at having once more regained its bed.

Jim sighed and said to Iron Skull: "She's taken a hundred thousand dollars at a mouthful. I'll put that in my expense account for my trip to Washington."

Iron Skull grunted: "We'll be lucky if we get off that cheap. This will make talk for every farmer on the Project. They'll all be up to tell you how you should have done it."

Jim shrugged his shoulders. "This isn't the first flood we've weathered, Iron Skull. Come up to the house while I change my clothes."

The two started along the road that wound up to the low mountain top where the

group of adobe cottages known as "officers' quarters" was located. The cottages were occupied by Jim's associate engineers and their families.

"I suppose you learned that your friends came," said Iron Skull. "They wanted a tent for his health, so I put them in the tent house back on the level behind the quarters.

"I didn't know of their coming until I was leaving Washington," said Jim. "How are they?"

"She stood the trip fine. He was pretty well used up, poor cus! She is awful patient with him. She's all you've said about her and then some. The ladies have all called on her but he don't encourage them. I stood a good deal from him, then I just told him to go to hell. Not when she was round, of course."

Jim listened intently. He knew the whole camp must be alive with gossip and curiosity over his two guests. An event of this order was a godsend in news value to the desert camp.

"Much obliged to you," was Jim's comment.

"How'd the Hearing go?" asked Iron Skull.

Jim shook his head and sighed. "They are convinced down there, I guess, that the Service is rotten. I kept my mouth shut and sawed wood. The Secretary is good medicine. You should have heard Uncle Denny jump in and make a speech. Bless him. I felt like a fool. What the Secretary thinks about the whole thing nobody knows."

Iron Skull grunted. After a moment he said: "Folks down at Cabillo are peeved at the way you are making the main canal. Old Suma-theek is back with fifty Apaches. That's one of them we pulled out of the sand. I've fixed a separate mess for them. I think we can reorganize one of the shifts so as to reduce the number of foremen."

Jim paused before the door of his little gray adobe. "Will you come in, Iron Skull?"

"I'll wait for you in the office," replied Williams. He turned down the mountainside toward a long adobe with a red roof.

Jim walked in at the open door of his house. The living room was long and low,

with an adobe fireplace at one end. The walls were left in the delicate creamy tint of the natural adobe. On the floor were a black bearskin from Makon and a brilliant Navajo that Suma-theek had given him. The walls were hung with Indian baskets and pottery, with photographs of the Green Mountain and the Makon, with guns and canteens and a great rack of pipes. This was the first home that Jim had had since he had left the brownstone front and he was very proud of it. He had inherited his predecessor's housekeeper, who ruled him firmly.

Jim dropped his suit case and called, "Hello, Mrs. Flynn!"

A door at the end of the room opened and a very stout woman came in, her ruddy face a vast smile, her gray hair flying. She was wiping her hands on her apron.

"Oh, Boss Still, but I'm glad to see you! You look pindlin'. Ain't it awful about the dam! I bet you're hungry this minute. God knows, if I'd thought you'd be here for another hour I'd have had something against your coming. And if God lets me live to spare my life, it won't happen again."

She talked very rapidly and as she talked she was patting Jim's arm, turning him round and round to look him over like a mother.

Jim flashed his charming smile on her. "Bless you, Mother Flynn! I know it's a hundred years since you've told me what God knows! I'll have a bath and go down to the office. I've had nothing to eat since morning." This last very sadly.

It had the expected effect on Mrs. Flynn, whose idea of purgatory was of a place where one had to miss an occasional meal.

She groaned: "Leave me into the kitchen! At six o'clock exactly there will be fried chicken on this table!"

Mrs. Flynn made breathlessly for the kitchen pausing at the door to call back: "And how's your mother and your Uncle Denny? I've been doing the best I can for your company. They ate stuff I took 'em only the first day, then she went to housekeeping."

"Thank you," said Jim, absently. He went into his bedroom. This, too, was uncolored. It was a simple little room with only a cot, a bureau and a chair in it. The walls were bare except for the little old photograph of Pen in her tennis clothes.

In half an hour Jim had splashed in and out of his bath, was shaved and clad in camp regalia; a flannel shirt, Norfolk coat and riding breeches of tan khaki, leather puttees and a broad-brimmed Stetson. At his office awaiting him were his engineer associates and Iron Skull, and he put in a long two hours with them, his mind far less on the flood and the Hearing than on the fact that Penelope was waiting for him, up in the little tent house.

It was not quite eight o'clock when Jim stood before the tent house, waiting for courage to rap.

Suddenly he heard Sara's voice. "I won't have women coming up here to snoop! Understand that, Pen, right now. Hand me the paper and be quick about it."

Jim felt himself stiffened as he listened for Pen's voice in answer.

CHAPTER XII

THE TENT HOUSE

"Leave Old Jezebel to herself and she soon returns to old ways. She likes them best for she is a woman."

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

Pen's voice, when it came, was lower and fuller than he had remembered it but there was the old soft chuckle in it.

"Cross patch! Draw the latch! Say please, like a nice child and then I'll play a game of cards with you."

Jim rapped on the door and stepped in. "Hello, Pen!" he said, holding out his hand.

She was changed and yet unchanged. A little thinner, older, yet more beautiful in her young womanhood than in her charming girlhood. Her chestnut hair was wrapped in soft braids around her head instead of being bundled up in her neck. Her eyes looked larger and deeper set but they were the same steady, clear eyes of old; ageless eyes; the eyes of the woman who thinks. She had the same full soft lips, and as Jim held out his hand the same flash of dimples.

"Hello, Still! The mountains have come to Mahomet!"

"And a poor welcome I gave you," replied Jim. "Hello, Sara."

Jim turned to the great invalid chair. There, propped up in cushions, lay a fat travesty of the old Saradokis. This was a Sara whose tawny hair was turning gray with suffering; whose mouth, once so full and boyish, was now heavy and sinister, whose buoyancy had changed to the bitter irritability of the hopeless invalid.

Sara looked Jim over deliberately, then dropped his hand. "How do you think I am? Enjoying the dirty deal I've had from life?"

Jim had not realized before just what a dirty deal Sara had been given. "I'm sorry

about it, Sara," he said.

Saradokis gave an ugly laugh. "Sounds well! I've never heard a word from you since the day we ran the Marathon. You hold a grudge as well as a Greek, Jim."

"Gee, I'd forgotten all about the race!" exclaimed Jim.

"I haven't," returned Sara. "Neither the race nor several other things."

Jim shrugged his shoulders and turned to Pen, who was watching the two men anxiously.

"Tell me about your plans. I'm mighty happy to have you here."

"Sara's had the feeling for a long time that this climate would help him, and we've talked in a general way about coming. It was Mr. Freet that told Sara he thought there were some good real estate chances here and that decided Sara. Sara has done him a number of good turns in investments round New York."

Jim looked at Sara sharply but made no comment on Pen's remarks. "Are you comfortable here?" he asked, looking about the tent house.

It was a roomy place. There was a good floor and a wooden wainscoting that rose three feet above it. The tent was set on this wainscoting, which gave plenty of head space. A gasolene stove in one corner with a table and chairs and a cupboard formed the kitchen. A cot for Pen and a book shelf or two with a corner clothes closet and some hammock swung chairs completed the furniture. Pen had achieved the homelike with some chintz hangings and a rug.

"I am getting our meals right here," said Pen. "The steward said we could have them sent up from the mess, but it's less expensive and more fun to get them camp fashion here. The government store is a very good one and all the neighbors have called and have brought me everything from fresh baked bread to cans of jelly. They are so wonderfully kind to me!"

Sara was staring at Jim with an insolent sort of interest. He had full use of his arms, as was evident when he gave the great wheel chair a quick flip about so as to shade his eyes from the lamp. As Jim watched him all the resentment of the past eight years welled up within him with an added repugnance for Sara's fat helplessness and ugly temper that made it difficult for him to sit by the invalid's chair.

When Pen had finished her account Sara said, "You made rather a mess, didn't you, in handling the flood today?"

"You were splendid, Jimmy!" cried Pen. "I saw the whole thing!"

Jim shook his head. "It was expensive splendor!"

"You will find it difficult to explain your lack of preparation to an investigating committee, won't you?" asked Sara.

"If you can give a recipe for flood preparation," said Jim good naturedly, "you will have every dam builder in the world at your feet."

Sara grunted and changed the subject and his manner abruptly.

"Got any decent smoking tobacco, Still?"

"That is hard to find here," replied Jim. "It dries out fast and loses flavor. I've got some over at the house I brought back from the East. I'll go over and get it now. Will you let Pen walk over with me? I'd like to have her see my house."

"Makes no difference to me what she does. Hand me that book, Pen, before you start."

Out under the stars Jim pulled Pen's hand within his arm and asked, "Pen, is he always like that?"

"Always," answered Pen. "Do you remember the 'Wood-carver of Olympus'? How he was hurt like Sara and how he blasphemed God and was embittered for years? He was reconciled to his lot after a time and people loved him. I have so hoped for that change in poor Sara, but none has come."

"Pen!" cried Jim suddenly. "I gave you my sign and seal! Why did you marry Saradokis?"

Pen answered slowly, "Jim, why wouldn't you understand and take me West with you when I begged you to?"

"Understand what?" asked Jim, tensely.

"That Sara's hold on me was almost hypnotic, that it was you I really cared for, as I realized as soon as Sara was hurt. If only you had had the courage of your convictions, Still!"

Jim winced but found no reply and Pen went on, her voice meditative and soft as if she were talking not of herself but of some half-forgotten acquaintance.

"I used to feel resentful that Sara thought I was worth such constant attention, while you, in spite of the Sign and Seal, were quite as contented with Uncle Denny as with me. And yet, after it all was over and I had settled down to nursing Sara for the rest of my life, I could see that I had had nothing to give you then and Uncle Denny had. Life is so mercilessly logical—to look back on, Jimmy."

Jim put his hand over the cold little fingers on his arm. Pen went on. "I did not try to write to you. I——"

But Jim could bear no more. "Pen! Pen! What a miserable fool I am!"

"You are nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Pen, indignantly "What do you think of the mess I've made of my life, if you think you are foolish?"

"What am I to do? How can I make it up to you?" cried Jim.

"By letting me stay in your desert for a time," answered Pen. "I know I'm going to love it."

They were at Jim's doorstep and he made no reply. As usual, words seemed futile to him. He showed Pen his house and found the tobacco, letting Mrs. Flynn do all the talking. Then, still in silence, he led Pen back to her tent. At the door he gave her the tobacco and left her.

Jim had a bad night. He stayed in bed until midnight; then to get away from his own thoughts he dressed and went out to the dam. The water had reached its height. There was nothing to be done save wait until Old Jezebel grew weary of mischief. But Jim tramped up and down the great road between the dam and the lower town all night.

His mind swung from Pen to the Hearing and from the Hearing to the flood, then back to Pen again. From Pen his thoughts went to his father and with his father he paused for a long time.

Was the evil destiny that had made his father fail to follow him, too? Jim had always believed himself stronger than his father, somehow better fitted to cope with destiny. Yet ever since his trouble with Freet on the Makon there had been growing in Jim a vague distrust of his own powers. He could build the dams,

yes, if "they" would leave him free to do so. If "they" would not fret and hound him until his efficiency was gone. It was the very subtlety and intangibility of "they" that made him uneasy, made him less sure of himself and his own ability.

He had planned, after he had finished his work, to turn his attention to solving the problems of old Exham. How was he to do this if he was not big enough to cope with his own circumstance? And was he going to miss the continuation of the Manning line because he had failed to grasp opportunity in love as in everything else?

Dawn found Jim watching the Elephant grow bronze against the sky. The Elephant had a very real personality to Jim as it had to everyone else in the valley.

"What is to be, is to be, eh, old friend?" said Jim. "But why? Tell me why?"

The sun rolled up and the Elephant changed from bronze to gold. Jim sighed and went up to his house.

All that day crowds of workmen on the banks watched Old Jezebel romp over their working place and they swore large and vivid oaths regarding what they would do to her once they got to balking her again. It was about noon that a buckboard drawn by two good horses stopped at the foot of the cable tower. The driver called to Iron Skull Williams, who was chewing a toothpick and chatting to Pen. Williams led Pen up to the buckboard.

"Like to introduce Oscar Ames, one of our old-time irrigation farmers," said Iron Skull. "And this is Mrs. Ames, his boss. And this lady is a friend of the Big Boss —Mrs. Saradokis."

Pen held out her hand and the two women looked at each other in the quick appraising way of women. Mrs. Ames was perhaps fifty years old. She was small and thin and brown, with thin gray hair under her dusty hat and a thin throat showing under her linen duster. Her face was heavily lined. Her eyes were wonderful; a clear blue with the far-seeing gaze of eyes that have looked long on the endless distances of the desert. Yet, perhaps, the look was not due altogether to the desert, for young as she was, Pen's eyes had the same expression.

"I am glad to know you," said Penelope.

"Thank you," said Mrs. Ames, bashfully.

Oscar Ames shook hands heartily. He was a big man of fifty, with hair and skin one shade of ruddy tan.

"Glad to meet you, ma'am. Say, Iron Skull, how'd you come to let the water beat you to it? This adds another big cost to us farmers' bill."

Williams grunted. "Wish you folk had been up on the Makon. That's where we had real floods. Ames, we are doing our limit. Ain't you old enough yet to know that a lift under the arm carries a fellow twice as far as a kick in the pants? Here's the Boss now. Light on *him*! Poor old scout!"

Jim was on horseback. He rode slowly up and dismounted. "How are you, Ames? And Mrs. Ames? Have you met Mrs. Saradokis? Ames, before you begin to chant my funeral march let me ask you if you don't want to sell that south forty you say I'm not irrigating right. Mr. Saradokis represents some Eastern interests. Perhaps you'd like to meet him."

Oscar grinned a little sheepishly. "Business before pleasure! I'll go right up to see him now."

"Then you must come up with me," said Penelope to Mrs. Ames, and the two women followed after Jim and Oscar.

The climb was short but stiff. Pen had not yet become accustomed to the five thousand feet of elevation at which the officers' camp was set, so she had no breath for conversation until they reached the tent house. Sara lay in his invalid chair before the open door, maps, tobacco and magazines scattered over the swing table that covered his lap. Pen, as if to ward off any rudeness, began to explain as she mounted the steps:

"Here is a gentleman who has land for sale, Sara." Sara's scowl disappeared. He gave the Ames family such a pleasant welcome that Jim was puzzled. Ames and Jim dropped down on the doorstep while Mrs. Ames and Pen took the hammock chairs.

"Have you people been long in this country?" asked Pen.

"Thirty years this coming fall," replied Ames, taking the cigar Sara offered him and smelling it critically. "I was a kid of 21 when I took up my section down on the old canal. I couldn't have sold that land for two bits an acre a year after I took it up. I refused two hundred dollars an acre for the alfalfa land the other day."

"You must have done some work in the interval," commented Sara.

Jim, leaning against the door post, watched Sara through half closed eyes and glanced now and again at Pen's eager face. Ames puffed at his cigar and gazed out over the desert.

"Work!" he said with a half laugh, "why when I took up that land sand and silence, whisky and poker were the staples round here. I built a one-room adobe, bought a team, imported a plow and a harrow and a scraper and went at it. I've got a ten-acre orange grove now and two hundred acres of alfalfa and a foreman who lets me gad! But no one who ain't been a desert farmer can imagine how I worked."

Pen spoke softly. "Were you with him then, Mrs. Ames?"

The little woman looked at Pen with her far-seeing eyes. "Oh, yes, I don't know that Oscar remembers, but we were married in York State. I was a school teacher."

After the little laugh Pen asked, "Do you like the desert farming?"

"I never did get through being homesick," answered Mrs. Ames. "My first two babies died there in that first little adobe. I was all alone with them and the heat and the work."

"Jane, you let me talk," interrupted Oscar briskly. "We both worked. The worst of everything was the uncertainty about water. Us farmers built the dam that laid sixty miles below here. Just where government diversion dam is now. But we never knew when the spring floods came whether we'd have water that year or not. More and more people took up land and tapped the river and the main canal. Gosh! It got fierce. Old friends would accuse each other of stealing each other's water. Then we had a series of dry years. No rain or snow in the mountains. And green things died and shriveled, aborning: The desert was dotted with dead cattle. Three years we watched our crops die and——"

Mrs. Ames suddenly interrupted. There was a dull red in her brown cheeks. "I wanted to go home the third year of the drought. All I had to show for fifteen years in the desert was two dead babies. I wanted to go home."

"And I says to her," said Ames, "I said 'For God's sake, Jane, where is home if it isn't here? I can't expect you to feel like I do about this ranch for you've stuck to the house. I know every inch of this ranch. Ain't I fought for every acre of it,

cactus and sand storm and water famine? Ain't I sweat blood over every acre? Ain't I given the best years of my life to it? And you say, 'Let's give it up! It ain't home!' I certainly was surprised at Jane."

"I have worked too," said Jane Ames, gently, to Penelope. "I'd had no help and had cooked for half a dozen men and—and—then the babies! Having four babies is not play, you know!"

"Oh, I know!" exclaimed Amos impatiently. "You worked. That was why I was so surprised at you wanting to let everything go. But you hadn't made things grow like I had. I suppose that's why you felt different. That winter the snows was heavy in the mountains and we were tickled at the thought of high water in the spring. We all got out in May to strengthen the dam, hauling brush and stone. But the water rose like the very devil. We divided into night and day shifts, then we worked all the time. But it was no use. The whole darned thing went out like Niagara. Forty-three hours at a stretch I worked and the dam went out! And the next year the same. Then it was that we began to ask for the Reclamation Service."

Pen drew a long breath and looked from Ames' strong tanned face out at the breathless wonder of the landscape. Far beyond the brooding bronze Elephant lay the chaos of the desert, yellow melting into purple and purple into the faint peaks of the mountains.

"What I can't understand, Ames," said Jim slowly, "after all this, is why you roast the Service so."

Ames flushed. "Because," he shouted, "you are so damned pig-headed! You aren't building the dam for us farmers. You are building it for the glory of your own reputation as an engineer."

There was a moment's silence in the tent house.

CHAPTER XIII

THE END OF IRON SKULL'S ROAD

"The Indians know that the spirit blends with the Greater Spirit, and I myself have seen every atom that was mortal lift again and again to new life, out of the desert's atom drift."

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

Jim shrugged his shoulders. Sara's eyes narrowed as he half smiled to himself.

"For instance," Ames went on, "what are you making the third canal so big for? We don't need it that size. You're wasting time and our money. We've got to pay for the project, us farmers. You don't take any interest in that fact though."

"You don't need a canal that big, but your children will," said Jim. "I'm building this dam for the future. You farmers never built for anything but the present. That's why your dams went and the water wars were on. But you can't teach a farmer anything."

Jim spoke with a cold contempt that startled Penelope. Ames' kindly eyes were blazing.

"No, but maybe us farmers can teach an engineer something. And I don't know a better talking point for starting an investigation than the way you let the flood rip everything to pieces."

"Which portion of your land is for sale, Mr. Ames?" asked Pen. "My husband has a map of the valley over there."

Jim rose and took up his pony's reins. "I'm sorry anything unpleasant came up, Pen. But you'll find out I'm a fool and a crook some time, so it might as well be now. I must get back." He smiled, lifted his hat and rode off. The four in the tent stared after him.

"He always seems so kind of alone," said Mrs. Ames. "They say his men will do anything for him and yet he always seems kind of lonely. I don't seem to hate him the way the rest of the valley does. He's so young, he don't know how to be

patient yet."

"Oh, they don't hate him, do they!" protested Pen.

"You bet!" answered Ames succinctly. Then he added: "You'll have to excuse me saying that. I forgot you was his friend. But this here valley is like my child to me. I'm fighting for her."

"We want to know the truth about him," said Sara. "Are you really trying to get rid of him?"

Ames nodded and picked up the map. "I don't think he's crooked, like some do. I just think he's too young and pig-headed for the job."

"How do you know he's not crooked?" asked Sara.

Pen drew a startled breath. Ames looked at Sara curiously. "I thought you was his friend."

"He's my wife's friend," replied Sara. "You know what the Congressional committee reported about him."

"Sara!" cried Pen. "You know Jim couldn't do a crooked thing to save his life!"

Sara's black eyes blazed dangerously. Mrs. Ames stirred uncomfortably and Pen rose. "Let's leave the men to their land sales and go out where we can get a view of the camp, Mrs. Ames," she said.

The two women walked slowly out to the mountain edge and settled themselves on a rock.

"I'm sorry anything unpleasant occurred," said Pen.

"Don't you let it worry you," replied Mrs. Ames. "I'm used to it. Ever since the dam was started, Oscar has been like an old maid with an adopted baby."

"I'm so sorry Jim has made himself unpopular here," said Pen. "He and I were brought up by my uncle who married Jim's mother. And Jim is fine. The Lord made Jim and then broke the mold. There's no one like him; no one cleaner and truer——"

Mrs. Ames looked at Pen thoughtfully. Then she patted the girl's hand.

"Don't you worry about him. He's got lots to learn but the Lord don't waste stuff

like him. I would be perfectly happy if my boy turned out like him."

Pen smiled a little uncertainly. "We who know him so well are foolish about Jim. Tell me about your children."

"I have two left," replied Mrs. Ames. "They're at school in Cabillo. I was bound they should have their chance. I'd like to ask you something. Have you got a pattern for the waist you've got on? I'd like to make one for my Mary. Though I don't know! My hands are so rough I can't handle embroidery silks very good."

She held up two work distorted hands. "I made this blouse myself," said Pen. "I'd love to make one for your Mary. Time will hang on my hands out here, some days."

"That's nice of you," said the little desert woman, taking the gift as simply as it was offered. "You tell me what materials to get. I guess I can find some way to pay you up."

"Come to see me, or let me come to see you," exclaimed Pen. "That will be pay enough. I have few friends, for my husband doesn't like them. But I can see that he has taken a liking to you two."

"The minute I saw you, I knew something pleasant had happened to me," said Jane Ames. "You don't mind having an old woman for an admirer, do you?"

Pen's dimples showed. "The more I see of men, Mrs. Ames, the better I like women."

Jane Ames nodded understandingly. "The women I know all have got it hard one way or another but I guess desert farming ain't the worst thing that can happen to a woman. Here comes Oscar. I suppose he's mad because I ain't down at the buckboard counting the minutes till he gets to me. Good-by, my dear! I'll see you soon."

Pen did not return to the tent house at once. She saw Iron Skull up on the mountainside watching a group of Indians break out the first line of a road and she strolled over to talk to him. Jim's letters home had been full of Iron Skull and Pen felt as if she knew him well.

"How do, Mrs. Saradokis?" said Williams.

"Are they all Indians?" asked Pen staring round-eyed at the group of workmen.

Iron Skull nodded. "Jicarilla and Mohave Apaches. I've fought with the older men. They make good workmen if you understand them. Old Suma-theek over there is one of my best friends."

There might have been fifty of the Indians, stalwart fellows, using pick and shovel with a deliberate grace that fascinated Pen. She watched in silence for a moment, then she said:

"Mr. Williams. I'm worried about Jim. Is it really true that they are trying to oust him?"

Iron Skull looked at Pen's anxious hazel eyes, then out at the ranges. Then he scratched his head.

"I'm a little worried myself, Mrs. Saradokis. He's up against a bad proposition and he just won't admit it. I don't like to nag him. You see, him and me are just naturally partners though I am old enough to be his father. And there's some ways a man can't nag another man."

"Do you think I could help him?" asked Pen. "He and I've always been good friends."

Williams hesitated, then he spoke with a sudden deep earnestness that surprised Pen: "If you don't help him, things will be bad for Boss Still. And you're the only person I know of that could influence him."

He paused as he saw Pen flush painfully, then he went on a little awkwardly: "Maybe you'll understand me better if—if I tell you I was with Boss Still when a —Mr. Dennis wrote about your marriage. I know about how he felt and all and I sort of look on your coming at this particular time as a kind of a godsend.

"Now I'm going to tell you some things confidential and leave it to your judgment how to act. Boss Still, he sort of worshiped Freet. You know who he is?"

Pen nodded. Williams went on. "Freet, as I size it up, wanted to break a smart cub in to be a kind of cat's paw for him in selling water power to the right folks and running the canals right. It's darn seldom you meet a good engineer that's money hungry. But Freet is. He's a miser in a way. But up on the Makon, he found out the Boss is as innocent as a baby of graft and more'n that he had his head in the clouds so's there was mighty little hope of his coming down to earth. So Freet got him sent down here.

"Well, the time's coming down here when there'll be a nice lot of water power. It belongs to the farmers after they pay for the dam, but the idea is for the engineer in charge to show 'em where to sell it to best advantage. If the engineer here ain't the right kind, the Water Power trust can make him trouble. All sorts of ways, you see. Getting the farmers sore at him is one. See?"

Pen nodded again, her eyes wide and startled. "Now," said Iron Skull, "don't be offended, but I'm wondering about your husband. I know Freet knows him and if it should just happen that your husband had any old scores to settle with the Boss ____"

He paused and Pen exclaimed: "I believe we'd better go right back to New York, though as far as I know we're out here just for Sara's health and for him to buy up some land Mr. Freet knew about."

"Now don't get excited," said Williams. "Remember this here is all speculation on my part. You stay right here. If it wasn't your husband, it would be someone else and I'd rather it would be someone that has you to watch 'em! And that ain't the most important part of your job, either. Mrs. Saradokis, somehow the Boss ain't getting the grip on things he'd ought to. I don't mean in engineering. He just can't be beat at that. I don't know just what it is, but he's a big enough man to have this valley in the hollow of his hand. And he ain't. I want you to help me find out why and then *make* him get away with it. This little old United States needs men of his blood and kind of mind. I've fell down on my job. Don't you let him fall down on his. It's the one way you can pay up for—for the other thing you took out of his life."

Pen stood with tear-blinded eyes and trembling lips. Iron Skull cleared his throat: "I hope you don't mind my butting in this-a-way!"

Pen shook her head. "I'll do my best," she said. "Only I'm pretty small for the job."

"Here he comes now," said Williams.

Jim rode up and dismounted. "Hello, Pen! What do you think of my roads? I'm crowding as many men onto the roads as I can until the water goes down. Idleness is bad for them. You see, in spite of electric lights and a water system we're a long way from civilization and it gets on the men's nerves unless we keep 'em busy. I'm going to start a moving picture show in the lower camp. The official photographer will run it for us. Just the usual five-cent movies, you

know. Anything above running expenses will go toward the farmers' debt."

Iron Skull moved away to speak to Suma-theek. Jim went on slowly: "You can see what I'm up against in Ames. Any day I may get a recall. Every farmer on the project hates me for some reason or other. I tell you, Pen, if they don't let me finish my dam and the roads to and from it, it will ruin my life."

Pen's tender eyes studied Jim's face. Long and thin, with its dreamer's forehead and its steel jaw, it was the same dear face that Penelope had carried in her heart since that spring day long ago when a long-legged freshman had said to her, "I'm glad you came. I'm going to think a lot of you. I can see that."

"You know, Jim," she said, "that your mother and Uncle Denny always shared your letters with me?"

Jim nodded. "I wrote them for that."

"And so I really know a good deal about your work. Uncle Denny and I studied the maps and the government reports and then he actually saw the dams, you know, and would tell me all the details. Honestly, we'd qualify as experts in any court! And if you'll just let me share your worries while I'm out here, I shall be prouder even than Uncle Denny after you've asked his advice. And won't I crow over him after I get back to New York!"

A glow came to Jim's eyes that had not been there for years. "Gee, Pen! You tempt me! But I'm not going to load you up with my troubles. You have enough with Sara. Perhaps Sara will shoot Ames for me! Sara looks like a sure-enough gunman, now. How he has changed, Pen!"

"If only you could have forgiven him enough to have written him once in a while, Jim. After all he's been more than punished, even for the Marathon matter or for that crazy romance about the ducal inheritance. I realized, Jim, after I had married him, that Sara was quite capable of the Marathon incident. Yet I wish you had forgiven him!"

"The Marathon, Pen!" cried Jim. "For heaven's sake, don't suppose that was why I didn't write to Sara! It's the dirty trick he did in marrying you that I'll never get over!"

"Oh, but that's not fair!" returned Pen. "He—well, anyway, he's a cripple now and needs your help."

"I—help Sara!" exclaimed Jim. "Why I simply don't know he's living! It's my turn now. Sara has had his innings. Desert methods are perfectly simple and direct and I'm a desert man. You are here with me, Penelope, and you are going to stay with me."

Iron Skull was coming back. Pen laughed. "You and Sara ought to write movie dramas, Jim." Then she sobered. "Don't misunderstand my coming to the dam, Jimmy. I've learned a good many things since you left me in New York. One thing is that we can't cut our lives loose from other lives and be a law to ourselves. Another is that any responsibility we take up voluntarily ought to be carried to the end."

Jim looked at Pen curiously and his jaw set. She was several years younger than Jim, yet something had come to her in the years just past that made him in some ways feel immature. But Jim had not hungered and thirsted for eight years in starry solitudes with one memory and one dream to keep his heart alive, to relinquish the dream without a fight.

"Penelope," he said, "you don't know me."

Pen smiled. "I know you to the last hair in that brown thatch of yours, Still Jim." Then she turned to Iron Skull, who was eager to have her talk to old Suma-theek.

For some days Jim had no opportunity to continue Pen's education with himself as textbook. He was engrossed in watching and tending the flood. Old Jezebel enjoyed herself thoroughly for a week. She fought and scratched at the mountainsides, but save the chafing of purple lava dust from their sides she made no impression on their imperturbability. She ripped down the last pouring, contemptuously leaving tons of rock and concrete at the foot of the concrete section. She roared and howled and shook the good earth with the noise of a railway train tearing through a tunnel. And Jim laughed.

"If it wasn't for you, old girl," he told her one afternoon, "I'd go crazy with the flea bitings of the Enemy. But you, bless your wicked soul, are an honest part of the game. I was bred from the beginning to fight floods. You attack in the open, like an honest vixen. Wait till I get my clutches on you again."

As Jim finished this soliloquy with considerable satisfaction to himself, Iron Skull came up and laid a newspaper on his saddle horn.

"The newspapers are roasting you, Boss Still."

"What do they say this time, Iron Skull?" Jim did not offer to lift the paper.

"You are inefficient. A friend of Freet's. They don't say you caused high water but they insinuate you suggested it to the weather man. You'd ought to tell the Secretary of the Interior the whole truth about the Makon, Boss Still."

"I can't do that, Iron Skull. I'm no squealer."

"I know. And I've always advised you to keep your mouth shut. But write to the editor of this paper, Boss."

Jim did not reply at once. The two were on the mountainside, not a great distance from Pen's house past which the new road was to run. The Indians were making ready for the sunset blasts. Above the distant roar of old Jezebel, old Suma-theek's foreman's whistle sounded clear and sweet as he signaled his men.

This was Geronimo's country, the land of the greatest of the Apache fighters. All about were the trails he and his people had made. Yonder to the north, across a harsh peak, was Geronimo's own pass. And now the last of Geronimo's race was building new trails for a new people.

The naked beauty of the brown and lavender ranges, the wholesome tang of the thin air, the far sweep of the afternoon sky, seemed suddenly remote to Jim.

"It's bigger than any editor," he said. "I don't know what is the matter. My only hope is that I can finish my dam before they get me."

"You've got to fight back, now," persisted Iron Skull.

"It's not my business to fight for permission to build this project!" cried Jim. "I was hired to build it! I was hired to fight old Jezebel and not the farmers!"

The little superintendent laid a knotted hand on Jim's knee. "You must take my advice in this, partner. I'm an old man and I'm likely to go any time. I'd like to feel that I'd helped you into a big success. It's the only record I'll leave behind me except a few dead Injuns. We both come of good old New England stock and we've got to show the old fighting blood ain't dead yet. I want to tell you—Hi! Suma-theek! Jump! Jump!"

Suma-theek was standing close to the mountain side out of which a blast had cut a great slice of rock. Up above his head some loosened stone was slipping down the mountain. As he called and before either Jim or the Indian saw the

impending danger, Iron Skull dashed across the road and shoved Suma-theek out of the danger line. But he miscalculated his own agility. The rapidly-sliding rock caught him on the head and he who had shed Indian bullets like raindrops went down like a pinon, smitten by lightning.

For one breath there was an appalling silence on the mountainside. The Apaches stood like a group of bronzes. The eagle who lived on the Elephant's side hung motionless high above the road. A cotton-tail sat with quivering nose and inquiring ears above the rift of the slide.

Then, with a shout, Jim flung himself from his horse and thrust the reins into an Indian's hands.

"Ride for the doctor!" and the Indian was off like a racing shadow.

At Jim's call, old Suma-theek gave a great groan and ran to lift Iron Skull's head. The Indians gathered about in wonder as Jim knelt beside his friend. For Iron Skull was dead.

Penelope ran out of the tent house at Jim's shout and made her way among the Indians to Jim's side.

"O Jim!" she cried. "O Jim! O Jim!" Then she dropped down and lifted the quiet face into her lap and wiped the blood from it and fell to sobbing over it. "Oh, what a useless death!" she sobbed. "What a useless death!"

Jim held his dead friend's hand close in his own. Through his tear-blinded eyes he saw a golden August field and felt other fingers clinging to his own.

The doctor, driving the mule ambulance, dashed up the half-made road. He looked Iron Skull over, and shook his head. "Get the stretcher out," he said to Jim.

Four Indians lifted the stretcher with Iron Skull on it, but when they would have put it in the ambulance, old Suma-theek stepped forward. He was taller even than Jim. His face was lean and wrinkled. His eyes were deep-set and tragic. He wore a twist of red cloth filet-wise around his head.

"He die for Injun. Let Injun carry 'em home," said the old Apache. "He heap good fighter. He speak truth. He keep word. He a big chief. He die for Apache. Let Apache carry 'em home."

The doctor looked inquiringly at Jim who nodded.

"I'll go on down to his house and get things ready for him," said the doctor and he drove off.

Jim and Penelope stood back. The four Indians bearing the stretcher followed after Suma-theek and in a long single line the remaining Apaches followed, joining Suma-theek in the death chant which is the very soul cry of the desolate:

"Ai! Ai! Ai! Beloved!
"Ai! Ai! Ai! Beloved!"

Down the winding road in a world all liquid gold from the setting sun, past the great shadow of the brooding elephant, past the cable towers and the engine house where the workmen stared, motionless and aghast, into the twilight of the valley where the electric lights flared, the chanting Indians carried the old shedder of bullets and laid him on his bed.

The camp was very silent that night. The Mexicans had feared and respected the little Superintendent. They had shared with the Indians the belief that the Little Boss could not be killed. The remains of the old Makon Pack were openly grief-stricken and told half-whispered stories of Iron Skull's prowess in the old days of tunnel building. The camp was smitten with awe at this sudden withdrawal. Sudden death was the rule on the Projects, yet it always left the camp breathless with surprise. The little community of twelve hundred souls, so isolated, so close to the primeval despite its electric lights, suddenly felt utterly alone and helpless.

Close after eight o'clock Jim dashed out of his house as if a voice had called him. He dropped down the steep trail to the canyon, crossed the canyon and took the steep trail up the Elephant's side. It was a sharp lift but Jim's long legs took it easily. When he reached the Elephant's top he crossed the broad back to a heap of bowlders and threw himself down in their shelter.

It was a moonlit night. Silver lay the desert with the black scratch of old Jezebel across it and the ragged purple shadows of the ranges to the east. Jim sat, chin in palm, elbow on knee, eyes wide on the soft wonder of the night. It always seemed to him that the desert night freed him of time and space and set him close to the Master Dream. He had learned to take his grief and his despairs to the desert mountain tops.

He had sat for an hour going over his life and his friendship with Iron Skull when a quick step sounded on the Elephant's back and Penelope swung past him out to the edge of the crater that formed the Elephant's east side. She stood there, her gray suit fluttering in the night wind, looking far and wide as if the view were new to her. Then she sat down on the ground, clasped her arms across her knees and bowed her head upon them. There was so much despair in the gesture that Jim could not bear the sight of it.

CHAPTER XIV

THE ELEPHANT'S BACK

"All living things have a universal hunger—to live again. The hunger for descendants is the same hunger."

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

"Penelope!" Jim called softly.

Pen raised her head as if she were dreaming.

"Pen!" repeated Jim, rising and walking slowly toward her. "Don't sit so near the edge."

"You can see the eagle's nest from here," said Pen, pointing down the crater wall. "What brought you up here, Still?"

"The Elephant is an old friend of mine, particularly when I'm broken up as I am tonight," replied Jim, taking Pen's hand and leading her back to his own place which was sheltered from the wind. "What brought you here? And how about Sara?"

"Sara took some morphine tonight. He will be motionless until morning. Ever since the new moon came, I've been promising myself a trip up here."

"So Sara adds dope to his other accomplishments!" commented Jim.

"He suffers so from insomnia, I don't blame him," answered Pen. "He has pain practically all of the time. I think he gradually grows worse. Poor Sara! He said tonight he hated the sight of even a dog that can use its own legs. Don't be too hard on him, Jim."

"I can't help being hard on him when I see how he treats you, the cad!" said Jim.

"He can't hurt me," said Pen. "I'm too sorry for him. Though I'll admit that I never knew what it was to lose control of my temper until after I was married. Still, where will they bury Iron Skull?"

"We have a little graveyard high on the mesa-top, yonder. He had not a relative in the world. He was of good old New England stock. He was trying to tell me something about his feeling for the Dam because of that when he was killed."

Jim was speaking a little brokenly and Pen laid her hand on his arm.

"The big dangers on the dam, we try to guard against. We can't even foresee a thing like Iron Skull's sacrifice. But I know he would have liked to have gone giving his life for someone he loved the way he did old Suma-theek. Sometimes I think there ought to be listed on a bronze tablet on the wall of each great structure the names of those who died in giving it birth. The big structures all are consecrated in blood. Skyscrapers, bridges, and dams all demand their human sacrifices. Thirty men went on the Makon. We've lost eight here so far."

"Sara was frightfully upset," said Pen. "That's why he took the morphine. Any thought of death makes him hysterical. The chant set him to swearing frightfully. Jim, I'd give anything to be able to set Sara right with himself."

"Pen, why did Sara come down here?" asked Jim abruptly.

Penelope hesitated. She did not want to voice Iron Skull's suspicions until she had verified them. "I don't know, Jim," she said finally. "I thought it was for his health and land, but I feel uneasy since I see his attitude toward you."

"If he has an idea of speculating in real estate, I'll have to head him off," said Jim. "Land speculation hurts the projects very seriously."

"What harm does it do?" asked Pen.

"Inflates land values so that farming doesn't pay with the already heavy building charges for the dam."

"Oh, I see!" mused Pen. "I'll talk to Sara about it."

"Don't say a word to him. I can fight my own battles with Sara. Penelope, what were you thinking about when you sat over there at the crater edge with your head on your arms?"

In the moonlight a slow red stained Pen's face. Jim watched her with puzzled eyes.

"I—I can't tell you all I was thinking," she said. "But some of it was because of Iron Skull. I was thinking how awful it will be for us to die, you and Sara and

me, leaving not a human being behind us, just as Iron Skull did."

"Most of us New Englanders are going that way," said Jim. "We Americans have so steadily decreased our birth rate in the past hundred years that we are nearly seven million babies below normal. South European children will take their places."

"Well, I don't know that it will hurt America in the long run," said Pen.

"I think it will," insisted Jim. "This country is governed by institutions that are inherently Teutonic. The people who will inherit these institutions are fundamentally different in their conceptions of government and education. I'm a New Englander, descendant of the Anglo-Saxon founders of the country. I can't see my race and its ideal passing without its breaking my heart."

"Why do you pass?" asked Pen sharply. "Why don't you brace up?"

"We don't know how," said Jim.

"I wonder if that's true," murmured Pen, "and if it is true, why!"

Silence fell between the two. The night wind sighed softly over the Elephant's broad back. The eagle, disturbed by the voices above his nest, soared suddenly from the crater, dipped across the canyon, and circled the flag that was seldom lowered before the office. The flag fluttered remotely in the moonlight.

"Look, Jim," whispered Pen, "the eagle and the flag so young and the Elephant so old and poor Iron Skull lying there dead! I wish I could make a legend from it. The material is there.... Oh, Sara said such horrible things tonight!"

Penelope shivered. Jim jumped up and held out his hand. "Come, little Pen! I'm going to take you home. How cold your fingers are!"

Jim kept Pen's cold little hand warm within his own whenever the trail permitted on the way back. But he scarcely spoke again.

The next day Iron Skull's funeral was held in the little adobe chapel which was filled to overflowing. A great crowd of workmen, Americans, Mexicans and Indians, gathered outside. At Suma-theek's earnest petition, Jim allowed the Indians to carry the coffin on their shoulders up the trail behind the lower town to the mesa crest where the little graveyard lay. And Jim also gave Suma-theek permission to make a farewell speech when the grave had been filled. The

missionary had protested but Jim was obdurate.

"Suma-theek owes his life to Iron Skull. I shall let him do his uttermost to show his gratitude. He is a fine old man, as fine in the eyes of God, no doubt, as you or I, Mr. Smiley."

So as the last of the sand and gravel was being shoveled into the grave, the old Apache stepped forward and raised his lean brown hand.

"My blood brother," he said, "he lies in this grave. If he have squaw or childs, old Suma-theek, he go give life for them. Iron Skull he no have anyone left on this earth who carry his blood. He gone! He leave no mark but in my heart. Injun and white they come like pile of sand desert wind drifts up. They go like pile of sand desert wind blows down. Great Spirit, He say, 'Only one strength for mens; that the strength of many childs, Injuns, they no have many childs. They die. Mexicans they have many childs, they live. Niggers, they have many. They live. Whites they no have many childs. Come some day like Injuns, like Iron Skull, they see on all of earth, no blood like theirs. They lay them down to die alone. Old Iron Skull, he a real man. He fight much. He work hard. He keep word. He die for friend. Maybe when Great Spirit look down at Iron Skull, it make Him love Iron Skull to know old Injun carry Iron Skull's mark in his lonely heart. O friends, I know him many, many years! We smoke many pipes together. We hunt together. We sabez each other's hearts. Ai! Ai! Ai! Beloved!"

And old Suma-theek broke down and cried like a child.

The crowd dispersed silently. The rising night wind began its task of sifting sand across Iron Skull's grave. Coyotes howled far on the mountain tops. And the night shift began to repair the cofferdam for old Jezebel had dropped suddenly back into her old trail.

A day or so after the funeral Sara said to Penelope, "When are you going down to see Mrs. Ames?"

"What makes you so friendly to the Ames family?" Pen asked in surprise.

"Ames may be useful to me," replied Sara. "I want you to cultivate him."

"I'll not do it for any such reason," said Pen quickly. "I like Mrs. Ames and I plan to see a great deal of her. But I'll not play cat's paw for you. What are you up to, Sara?"

"None of your business," said Sara.

Pen flushed, but fell back on the whimsical manner that was her defense against Sara's ill-nature.

"It's your subtlety that fascinates me, Sara. Did you ever try a steam roller?"

Sara scowled: "Of course, I suppose it's too much to ask you to take an interest in my business affairs. If I were a well man, I might hope to make an impression on you."

"By the way, Sara," said Pen, "land speculation hurts these Projects. I don't think you ought to try to make money that way. Of course, if Mr. Ames wants to sell you some land, I suppose I can't keep you from buying, but Jim says that, coupled with the heavy building charges, inflated land values are doing the Service a lot of harm."

Pen watched Sara closely. Sara when calm was close-mouthed. Sara when angry was apt to talk! His face flushed quickly.

"Jim! Jim!" he sneered. "I heard it all the time in New York and now I'm getting it here. Oh, wait and see, the two of you!"

For the first time since the first years of bitter adjustment, Pen showed fire. She crossed the room and stood over Sara's couch, her cheeks scarlet, her hazel eyes deep with some suppressed fire.

"Do you think I fear you, with your vile tongue and your yellow heart, George Saradokis? There is neither fear nor love nor hope nor regret left in my heart! It long ago learned that marriage is a travesty and our marriage a nightmare. Do you think your impudence or your threats *hurt* me any more? You waste your breath if you do. You and I have made a hopeless mess of our lives. Jim is doing a big work. If I find you are laying a straw in his way, I'll—I'll shove you, couch and all, over the canyon edge."

Sara suddenly laughed. Even as she uttered her threat Pen was mechanically straightening his pillow!

"Look here, Pen," he said, "I know I'm a devil! The pain and the awful failure of my life make me that. But I'll try to be more decent. For the Lord's sake, Pen, don't you go back on me or I'll take an overdose of morphine. I do want to make some money and any land deal that Ames and I put through, I'll let Jim pass on.

Does that satisfy you?"

It was not often that Sara tried to wheedle Pen. She looked at him suspiciously but nodded carelessly.

"All right! If Jim sees it I'll consent. If you get any honest enjoyment out of Mr. Ames, I'll get him up here often. Mrs. Ames is a dear."

"You are a good old sort, Pen," returned Sara. "Why can't you go down tomorrow? Mrs. Flynn would look out for me, I guess. They say that fellow Bill Evans will ride people anywhere in his machine."

"I'll go over and see Mrs. Flynn now," said Pen. She was really eager for a visit with Jane Ames. She wondered if Iron Skull might not have been over-suspicious regarding Sara's purposes. Sara had an unquenchable itch for money-making. During all his long illness he had never ceased, with his father's help, to trade in real estate. Pen suspected that the savings of many Greek immigrants were absorbed in Sara's and his father's schemes, none too honestly.

"Perhaps," said Pen, as she pinned on her hat, "Jim would take me down. Doesn't it seem natural though to have Jim doing things for me again!"

Some note in Pen's voice brought Sara to his elbow.

"Pen!" he shouted. "I've long suspected it. Are you in love with Jim Manning?"

CHAPTER XV

THE HEART OF A DESERT WIFE

"The squaws who come at times to crouch upon my back have the slow listening patience of the rabbits."

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

Pen paused, eyes angry, mouth disgusted: "You are the last person I'd ever tell, Sara, if I were. Don't add idiocy to your other accomplishments."

Sara's black eyes continued to glare for a moment. Then for the second time he astonished Penelope by laughing. He dropped back on his pillow.

"Pen! Pen! a lawyer could have given no better answer than that! I'm not worrying, Pen. You've stuck by me all these years. I know I'm safe to the end."

Penelope's scorn changed to pity. "I've been horrid today. You will have to forgive me, Sara. You must remember that you are no mild June day to live with!"

Sara gave a short nod. "Give me my pipe, Pen, and then jolly Mrs. Flynn up."

Mrs. Flynn, whose curiosity was only equaled by her kindness of heart, was only too willing to take care of Sara. Had a caged South African lion been placed in her care she would have had the same thrill at the thought of caring for it as at watching Sara. Great stories of Sara's marvelous temper had gone about the camp. Any extra steps he caused Mrs. Flynn she felt would be more than compensated for in the delectable gossip she would pick.

Pen did not ask Jim to take her down to the Ames place. She arranged to go down with Bill Evans, who kept a hog ranch near the dam. Bill fed his hogs on the camp table scrapings and filled in odd moments "renting out" his automobile. This was a sad-looking vehicle of an early vintage, held together by binding wire and bits of sheet iron. But Bill got twenty miles an hour out of the machine and took better care of it than he did of his wife.

The Ames ranch lay in the desert valley below the dam. Two hours after they left

the dam, Bill drew up before the Ames door with a rattle and a series of staccato explosions that would have done credit to an approaching army.

The trip down had been a noisy rush through multicolored ranges out onto a desert floor of brilliant yellow dotted with giant cactus, that austere sentinel of the desolate plains. Long before they left the mountain road Bill pointed out to Penelope the green spot in the desert that was the Ames ranch. The road, leaving the desert, ran along an irrigating ditch fringed with cotton woods. Beyond the road lay acre after acre of alfalfa, its peculiar living green melting far beyond in the shimmering of olive orchard and orange grove.

The ranch house was of yellow gray adobe, long and low, with a red roof. Oscar had made no attempt at beauty when he had added, year after year, room on room to the original box he had built for Jane. But he unknowingly had kept close to real art. He had built of the material of the country in the manner best suited to the exigencies of the country. The result, consequently, was satisfying to eye and taste.

The walls of a desert house must be thick, for coolness. The lines of the house must be broad and low and strong, to withstand the fearful winds of late winter and early spring. The Ames house lay comfortably on the desert as if it had grown up out of the sand and proposed to live forever. It was as natural a part of the landscape as the sentinel cactus.

Jane Ames, in a blue gingham dress, was standing in the door. She waved both hands as she recognized Pen. When the machine stopped she took Pen's bag.

"Of course I knew it was Bill's machine half an hour ago, but I didn't know my luck had changed enough to bring you."

"I can stay over night," said Pen, like a child out of school.

"Come straight into the parlor bedroom," said Jane. "Bill, you'll find Oscar in the lower corral."

Pen followed into the house. Jane led her through a vista of rooms into the parlor, which was furnished with a complete "near" mahogany set in green velvet. The parlor bedroom was furnished to match. Jane always showed the people whose opinion she valued her parlor first that the edge might be taken off the living room. After Pen had taken off her hat, she followed her hostess kitchenward.

The living room was big and square, the original house. It contained a wide adobe fireplace and its windows opened toward the orange grove. It was furnished with tables and chairs that Mrs. Ames had bought from an old mission in the neighborhood. They were hand-hewn and black with age. The Navajo floor rugs were soft and well worn. Jane apologized for the room, saying she left it old and ugly for the hired men and the children, then she established Pen in a rocking chair in the kitchen.

The kitchen was a model of convenience, boasting running water as well as a kitchen cabinet and a gasoline range.

"It took me just five years to raise enough chickens and eggs to buy the cabinet and the range," said Jane, taking a peep at the bread in the oven. "I begged and begged Oscar to get me things to work with every time he sent to the mail-order house to get farm machinery. But he'd just grunt. Finally I got mad. He had running water put in the barn and wouldn't send it on up to the house. He went to San Francisco that fall and I had men out here and put water in the kitchen. When he got back the bill was waiting for him and he was ashamed to complain. It isn't that men are so bad. It's just because they haven't any idea what real work housework is. How is your husband?"

"About as usual," replied Pen.

Jane Ames looked out the door, then back at Pen. "Are you ever sorry you got married?"

Pen looked a little startled, but after a moment she answered, "I used to be."

"You mean you aren't now?" asked Jane.

"I mean I'm glad I've got the things marriage has brought me."

Jane's eyes lighted. She sat down opposite Pen. "I'm just starved for a talk with some woman who isn't afraid to say what she really thinks about this marriage business. What have you got out of being married to a cripple?"

Pen chuckled. "Well, I'm really a first-class nurse, and like Bismarck, I can keep my mouth shut in seven different languages."

"Isn't that so!" exclaimed Jane. "Oscar insists on doing all the talking for us and I let him. Some day if I ever find anything worth saying, though, I'll surprise him. I'm in the 'What's the use?' stage right now. Men are awful hard to live with."

"Almost as hard as women!" said Pen. "We're all so silly about it. We expect marriage to bring us happiness with no effort on our own parts, just as if the only aim of getting married were to be happy."

"Mercy sakes!" exclaimed Jane. She sat forward on the edge of the chair. "Go on! Don't stop. I knew the minute I saw you that talking to you would beat writing to the advice column of a woman's magazine. What is it we marry for, anyhow?"

Pen laughed. "Well, when we don't marry to be happy, we marry out of curiosity. It's funny when you think of it. Two people with nothing in common have a period of insanity during which they tie themselves together in a hard knot which they can't undo and then they must feed on each other for the rest of their lives."

Jane gasped a little. "You—you aren't bitter, are you, Mrs. Penelope? I can't say your other name easy. You believe there are *some* happy marriages, don't you?"

Pen shrugged her shoulders. "No, I'm not bitter. I've just lost my illusions. I don't happen to know of any marriages so happy that they would tempt me to marry again."

"I feel kind of wicked talking this way," said Jane. "But," recklessly, "you've seen the world and I haven't. And it's my chance to learn real life. You don't mean people ought not to marry, do you?" This in a half-whisper of utter demoralization.

"Oh, no! Marriage is the best means we've found for perpetuating and improving the race. It's a duty we owe society, to marry. I don't believe much in divorce either. Except for unfaithfulness. Unless the average lot of us are true to the marriage ideal the whole institution will be tainted. I guess the safety of society lies in each of us looking at ourselves as average and not exceptional persons. Then we stick to the conventions. And the conventions weren't foisted on society from above. They were sweated out from beneath to satisfy; make it possible for us to endure each other."

Jane Ames threw up both her hands. "O my! You have been hurt or you'd never be so cold-blooded! I can't look at it as calmly as you do as if it all belonged to someone else. You never bore children to a man. You can't realize what selfishness and unkindness from the father of your children can mean. Do you know that I've borne two babies in this room—alone—not even a squaw to help

me? And I've watched the desert through the door and I've cursed it for what it's made of my marriage!" Jane gave a short laugh and held up her knotted, rough hands. "I had dimples on my knuckles when I came to this country."

Pen looked out the door and tried to picture to herself this other woman's life.

"I—I guess my safety has lain in my getting an impersonal view of things," she said apologetically.

"There, the bread is burning!" exclaimed Jane.

Pen laughed reminiscently. "There's a verse that says:

> "'Ice cream is very strange; so's a codfish ball,
> But the people people marry is the strangest thing of all!'"

"I guess you need me," said Jane, "as much as I need you. There comes Oscar and I haven't set the table."

Oscar was coming up the dooryard. He stepped a little high, in the gait of one accustomed to walking in shifting sands. He was big and upstanding, with a look of honesty that Pen liked.

No one who has not known a desert farmer can realize what his acres meant to Oscar Ames. The farmer of northern lands loves his acres. But he did not create them—he did not fight nature for them, until he had made himself over along with his land.

Nature fights inch by inch every effort of man to harness the desert to his uses. She scorches the soil with heat. She poisons it with alkali. She infests it with deadly vermin and—last and supreme touch of cruelty—she forbids the soil water unless she surrounds the getting of it with infinite travail and danger.

Heat and sandstorm, failure and famine, toil unutterable, these had been Oscar Ames' portion. When at last he had won his acres, had brought the barren sand to bearing, had made three hundred acres of desert a thing of breathing beauty from January to January, the ranch meant something to him that a northern farmer could not understand. And these three hundred acres were Oscar's world. He could not see beyond them. The dam was a mere adjunct to the Ames ranch. He would leave no stone unturned to see that it served his own ranch's needs as he saw them. If Sara saw this quality in Oscar and had any motive for playing on it, he could do infinite harm to Jim.

It was something of all this that Pen was thinking as Oscar crossed the yard. He came into the kitchen in a leisurely way and greeted Pen with the cordiality that belongs to the desert country. Penelope helped Jane to put the dinner on the table and the three sat down to eat.

The two were eager to hear details of Iron Skull's death, and after Pen had described it to them, Oscar began to talk about Sara.

"How long's your husband been bedridden?" he asked.

"Oscar!" exclaimed Jane.

"Jane, you keep quiet. What's the use of being secret about it? I guess both him and her know he's bedridden."

Pen told them the story of the accident.

"Isn't that fierce!" exclaimed Oscar. "He's the smartest young fellow I've met in years. I wish even now he was running the dam instead of Manning."

"Why?" asked Penelope.

"He'd build it for the farmer and have some business sense about it."

"You don't understand Mr. Manning," said Pen. "I wish you'd try to get to know him better."

Oscar grunted. "Does the doctors think your husband will get well?" he asked, finishing off his pie.

"Oscar!" cried Jane.

"Jane, you keep quiet. These are business questions. If Sardox and I are going to run this dam, we got to understand each other's limitations. I can't ask *him* if he's going to die."

"We just don't know anything about it," said Pen, gently. "Mr. Ames, I'm curious to know just how you and Sara are going to run the dam."

Oscar closed his mouth importantly to open it again and say, "I never talk business with ladies."

Jane laughed suddenly. "Gracious, Oscar! I'm not worrying but what I'll get all the details. He's the original human sieve, Mrs. Penelope."

Oscar joined in Pen's laugh and started for the door, shaking his head and picking his teeth. Pen looked after him uneasily.

That afternoon Pen and Jane went with Bill and Oscar for an automobile ride over the desert. The two women sat in the tonneau, Oscar in front with Bill. The desert road was rough, full of bowlders and ruts. But neither Oscar nor Bill was hampered by roads. Whenever some distant spot roused their curiosity, the machine left the road and plunged madly across the desert, through cactus thickets and yucca clumps, through draws and over sand drifts.

Oscar and Bill kept up a shouted conversation with each other. But Pen and Jane each clutched a side of the machine, braced their feet and gave their entire attention to keeping from being flung bodily from the car. Forewarned for miles, no living creature crossed their path. The din and the dust, the hairbreadth escapes made the discomfort of the ride for the two women indescribable.

When Bill finally drew up before the ranch house door with his usual flourish of staccato explosions, Oscar alighted and watched Pen and his wife crawl feebly from the tonneau.

"*Caramba!*" he said. "That was a fine ride! I've been wanting to get a look at that country and a talk with you, Bill, for a month. I feel well rested."

Pen and Jane looked at each other and at the two men's grins of complaisance. Then, without a word, the two women sank against each other on the doorstep and laughed until the men, bewildered and exasperated, took themselves off to the barn. Finally Jane rose and wiped her eyes.

"There's not an inch on my body that isn't black and blue," she said weakly.

Pen pulled herself up by clinging to the door knob. "That was a real 'pleasure exertion,'" she whispered feebly. "But I'd do it twice over for a laugh like this. I haven't laughed so for eight years."

Jane gave Pen a kitchen apron and tied one on herself while she nodded. "Thank heaven! I always could laugh. It's saved my reason many a time. I don't want you to do a thing about getting supper, but you'll be sitting round in the kitchen and that'll keep your skirt clean."

Pen picked up a pan of cold boiled potatoes and began to peel them with more good will than skill. "I do like you, Jane Ames," she said. "Two people couldn't laugh together like that and not have been meant to understand each other."

Jane set the tea kettle firmly on the stove. "We'll see each other a lot if we have to walk. Peel them thin, dear child. I'm a little low on potatoes."

"I'm not very expert," apologized Pen. "Sara is putting up with a good deal just now, for I'm learning how to cook."

"I guess he don't suffer in silence!" sniffed Jane.

The next morning, when Penelope climbed regretfully onto the front seat of the automobile, Oscar came hurriedly from the corral with a dark-mustached young man in a business suit.

"This is Mr. Fleckenstein, Mrs. Sardox," he said. "He's a lawyer and him and I are going up to the dam with you. He just stopped here on his way. I'm leaving his horse in the corral, Jane."

Jane and Penelope exchanged puzzled looks. "Your hair needs fixing, Mrs. Penelope," said Jane. "Come in the house for a minute."

Pen clambered down obediently and Jane led her far into the parlor bedroom. "Your hair was all right," she whispered, "but I want to warn you. Oscar is just a great big innocent. He is crazy over anyone he thinks is smart. That Fleckenstein is a shyster lawyer. I wouldn't trust a hot stove in his hands. You see that your husband don't get thick with him. Do you trust your husband in business?"

Pen winced but she looked into Jane's blue eyes and answered, "No."

"Do you like Mr. Manning and want him to succeed?"

"Yes," replied Pen.

"Well then, it's time I took notice of things on this project and you can help me by watching things up there. I won't take time to say any more right now. Oscar will be storming in here in a minute."

When they reached the dam that afternoon, Oscar and Fleckenstein called on Sara. Pen found that they would talk nothing but land values while she was in the tent, so she wandered out in search of Jim.

She found him at the dam site. He was talking to a heavy-set, red-faced man in khaki. He was considerably older than Jim, who introduced the stranger as Mr. Jack Henderson.

"Henderson will take Iron Skull's place," explained Jim. "You must remember how I wrote home of him and how he helped me save my reputation as a road-builder on the Makon. He's been down on the diversion dam."

Penelope held out her hand. "I shall never cease regretting that I didn't get to see the Makon," she said.

Henderson's gray eyes lost their keenness for a moment. "It was hard for me to come up knowing I was to take Iron Skull's job." Pen listened in surprise to his low, gentle voice. "You know, Boss Still Jim, if he'd had a better chance for a education he'd have made his mark. He was just naturally big. He could see all over and around a thing and what it had to do with things a hundred years back and a hundred years on. That's what I call being big. A good many fellows that lives a long time in the desert gets a little of that, but Iron Skull had it more than anyone I know. I wish he'd had a better chance. I can fill his job, Boss, as far as the day's work goes, but I can't give you the big look of things he could."

Henderson was standing with his hat off, and now he rumpled his gray hair and shook his head. Pen liked him at once.

Jim nodded. "I miss him. I always shall miss him. I often thought that if my father had come out to this country, he'd have grown to be like Iron Skull. And they are both gone."

"That's the way life acts," said Henderson. "It's always the man that ought to stay that goes. And there's never any explanation of how you're going to fill the gap. He's jerked out of your life and you will go lame the rest of your life for all you know. These here story books that try to show death has got a lot of logic about it are liars. There ain't any reason or sense about death. It just goes around, hit or miss, like a lizard snapping flies."

There was a moment's silence during which the three stared at the Elephant. Then Jack cleared his throat and said casually, in his gentle voice:

"You're going to have a devil of a job enforcing your liquor ruling, Boss. It'll make trouble with the whites and more with the *hombres*."

Jim's steel jaw set. "There's not to be a drop of liquor on this dam except in the hospital. I expect you to back me in this, Jack. You know what trouble I had on the Makon because I never came down hard."

"Sure, I'll back you," said Henderson gently. "But I just wanted you to realize

that it's going to be hell round a half mile track to enforce it. You never saw me backward about getting into a fight, did you?"

Jim smiled reminiscently and then said, "I'm going to start an ice cream and soft drink joint next to the moving picture show."

Here Pen laughed. "I asked one of the oilers in the cable tower the other day if he liked to work for the government. He grunted. I asked him if Uncle Sam didn't take good care of him and he said: 'Yes, and so does a penitentiary! What does men like the Big Boss know about what we want? Why don't he ask me?'"

Jim nodded. "That's typical. One of the hoboes I brought in half-starved the other day came to my office this morning and told me how to feed the camp. He doesn't like our menu. As near as I can make out this was his first experience at three meals a day and he never saw a bathtub before. There isn't a rough-neck in the camp that isn't convinced he could build that dam better than I. Eh, Jack?"

"Sure, all except the old Makon bunch."

"Well, we're up against the same old problem here, Henderson. We've got to have better co-operation and yet enough rivalry to keep every man on the job working his limit. The foremen don't pull together."

"In that case," said Henderson tenderly, "I'll begin by going over and kick the head off the team boss."

He smiled at Pen and started up the trail. Pen watched the workmen who were cleaning up the top of the concrete section.

"Did you have a good time with Mrs. Ames?" asked Jim.

"Still, she's a dear! And Oscar isn't so bad when you know him. Do you know, Jim, he actually believes that you are not building the dam for the farmers! Can't you do something to make him understand you?"

"Look here, Pen," replied Jim, "I'm building this dam for this valley, for all time, not for Oscar Ames or Bill Evans, nor for any one man. I'm doing my share in building. I'm not hired to educate these idiots."

Pen eyed Jim intently, trying to get his viewpoint and turning old Iron Skull's words over in her mind. Jim was standing with his hat under his arm and his brown hair blowing across his forehead.

"Pen," he said suddenly, "you are the most beautiful woman in the world."

Pen blushed clean to her eyebrows. Jim went on eagerly: "Penelope, I want to tell you how I feel about you. Will you let me?"

Pen looked at the Elephant helplessly. But the great beast lay mute and inscrutable in the sun. There was a look in Jim's eyes that Pen would have found hard to control had not Jim's secretary chosen that moment to interrupt them.

"Mr. Manning," he said, "a letter has just come in for you from the Secretary of the Interior. You told me to notify you when it came."

CHAPTER XVI

THE ELEPHANT'S LOVE STORY

"Coyotes hunt weaker things. Humans hunt all things, even each other, which the coyote will not do."

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

"Don't let me keep you here, Jim," exclaimed Pen so hastily that Jim could not help smiling. She scuttled hastily up the trail ahead of him, her heavy little hunting boots doing wonders on the rough path.

The Secretary's letter disturbed Jim very much. It was not the result he had expected from the Hearing at all. Nor was the letter itself easy for Jim to understand.

"MY DEAR MR. MANNING:

"There are several facts connected with your work that I would like to call to your attention. The Reclamation Service is an experiment, a magnificent one. It is not a test of engineering efficiency, except indirectly. Engineers as a class are efficient. It is an experiment to discover whether or not the American people is capable of understanding and handling such an idea as the Service idea. It is a problem of human adjustment. Is an engineer capable of handling so gigantic a human as well as technical problem? I shall be interested in getting your ideas along this line.

"—— Secretary of the Interior."

Jim laid the letter down. He recalled the Secretary's fine, inscrutable face and that something back of its mask that he had liked and understood. He felt sure that the letter had been impelled by that far-seeing quality that he knew belonged to the Secretary but for which he had no lucid word. And yet the letter roused in Jim the old sense of resentment. What did the Secretary want him to do; turn peanut politician and fight the water power trust? Did no one realize that the erecting of the dam was heavy enough responsibility for any one man?

His first impulse was to take the letter over to Pen. Then he smiled wryly. He

must not take all his troubles to her or she would get no relief from the burdening that Sara put upon her. So he brooded over the letter until supper time when he went with Henderson down to the lower mess. Jim ate with the lower mess frequently. It was almost the only way he had now of keeping in touch personally with his workmen.

After supper and a pipe in the steward's room Jim climbed the long road to the dam. The road hung high above the dam site. The mountains and the bulk of the Elephant were black in the shadowy regions beyond the arc lights. Black and purple and silver below lay the mighty section of concrete, with black specks of workmen moving back and forth on it, pygmies aiding in the birth of a Colossus. The night sky was dim and remote here. Despite the roar of the cableways, the whistles of foremen, the rushing to and fro of workmen, the flicker of electric lights, one could not lose the sense of the project's isolation. One knew that the desert was pressing in on every side. One knew that old Jezebel, having crossed endless wastes, having fed on loneliness, whispered threats of trouble to the narrow flume that for a moment throttled her. One knew that the Elephant never for a moment lost his sardonic sense of the impermanence of human effort.

When Jim reached his house, he found old Suma-theek camped on the doorstep.

"What is it, Suma-theek?" asked Jim.

"Old Suma-theek, he want make talk with you," replied the Indian.

Jim nodded. "I'd like to talk with you, Suma-theek. Wait till I get enough tobacco for us both and we'll go up on the Elephant's back, eh?"

Suma-theek grunted. The two reached the Elephant's top without conversation and sat for perhaps half an hour, smoking and mute. This was quite an ordinary procedure with them.

Finally Suma-theek said, "Why you make 'em this dam?"

"So that corn and cattle and horses will increase in the valley," replied Jim.

The Indian grunted. "Much talk! Why *you* make 'em?"

"It's my job; the kind of work I like."

"What use?" insisted Suma-theek. "People down in valley they much swear at you. Big Sheriff at Washington, he much swear at you. You much lonely. Much

sad. Why you stay? What use? Much old Suma-theek wonder at that. Why old Iron Skull work on this dam? Why you, so young, so strong, no have wife, no have child, marry dam instead? You tell old Suma-theek why."

Jim had learned on the Makon that while war and hunting might have been an Indian's business in life, his avocation was philosophizing. He had learned that many a pauperized and decrepit old Indian, warming his back in the sun, despised of the whites, held locked in his marvelous mind treasures of philosophy, of comment on life and living, Indian and white, that the world can ill afford to lose, yet never will know.

Jim struggled for words. "Back east, five sleeps, where I was born, there are many people of many tribes. They fight for enough food to eat, for enough clothes to wear. When I was a boy I said to myself I would come out here, make place for those people to come."

"But," said Suma-theek, "the dam it will no keep whites from fighting. They fight now in valley to see who can get most land. What use?"

"What use," returned Jim, "that you bring your young men up here and make them work? I know the answer. You are their chief. It is your business to do what you can to keep their stomachs full and their backs warm. You don't ask why or the end."

The Indian rolled another cigarette. He was like a fine dim cameo in the starlight. "I sabez!" he said at last. "Blood of man, it no belong to self but to tribe. So with Injuns. So with some whites. Not so with *hombres*."

Again the eagle, disturbed by voices, dipped across the canyon. "See, Suma-theek, make the story for me," said Jim. "There are the eagle and the flag so young and the Elephant so old. Make the story for me."

There was a long silence once more. The desert wind sighed over the two men. The noise of building came up faintly from below but the radiance of the stars was here undimmed.

Finally Suma-theek spoke:

"Long, long, many, many years ago, before whites were born, Injuns lived far away to the west, maybe across the great water. All Injuns then had one chief. He very great, very wise, very strong. But he no have son. He heap wise. He know, man no stronger than number of his sons. He get old. No have son. Then

he call all young men of tribe to him, and say: 'That young man shall be my son who shows me in one year the strongest thing in world, stronger than sun, stronger than wind, stronger than desert, than mountains, than rivers at flood.'

"All young men, they start out to hunt. All time they bring back to old chief strong medicine, like rattlesnake poison, like ropes of yucca fiber, like fifty coyotes fastened together. But that old chief he laugh and shake his head.

"One day young buck named Theeka, he start off with bow and arrow. He say he won't come back until he sure. Theeka, he walk through desert many days. Injuns no have horses then. Walk till he get where no man go before. And far, far away on burning sand, he see heap big animal move. It was bigger than a hundred coyotes made into one. Theeka he run, get pretty close, see this animal is elephant.

"And he say to self, 'There is strongest thing in world.' And he start follow this elephant. Many days he follow, never get closer. The more he follow, the more he want that elephant. One morning he see other dot move in desert. Dot come closer. It woman, young woman, much beautiful. She never say word. She just run long by Theeka.

"All time he look from elephant to her. All time he feel he love her. All time he think he no speak to her for fear he lose sight of elephant. By'mby, beautiful girl, she fall, no get up again. Theeka, he run on but his heart, it ache. By'mby he no can stand it. He give one look at elephant, say, 'Good-by, you strongest thing! I go back to her I love.' Then his spirit, it die within him, while his heart, it sing.

"He go back to girl. She no hurt at all. She put her arms round Theeka's neck and kiss him. Then Theeka say, 'Let strongest thing go. I love you, O sweet as arrow weed in spring!'

"And beautiful girl, she say: 'I show you strongest thing in world. Come!' And she take him by hand and lead him on toward elephant. And that elephant, all of a sudden, it stand still. They come up to it. They see it stand still because little To-hee bird, she circle round his head, sing him love songs.

"'O yahee! O yahai!
Sweet as arrow weed in spring!'

sing that little bird to Elephant. And he stop, stop so long here by river while that little bird build her nest in his side, he turn to stone and live forever.

"Then Theeka, he sabez. He lead his beautiful girl back to chief and he say to chief: 'I have found strongest thing in world. It is love.'

"And chief, he say: 'You and your children's children shall be chiefs. I have not known love and so I die.'"

Suma-theek's mellow voice merged into the desert silence. "But the eagle and the flag?" asked Jim.

"Injuns no understand about them," replied the old chief. "You sabez the story old Suma-theek tell you?"

"I understand," replied Jim.

"Then I go home to sleep," said Suma-theek, and he left Jim alone on the Elephant's back.

Jim sat long alone on the night stars. The sense of failure was heavy upon him. Wherein, he asked himself, had he failed? How could he find himself? Was his life to be like his father's after all? Had he put off until too late the mission he had set himself so long ago, that of seeking the secret of his father's inadequacy? For a few wild moments, Jim planned to answer the Secretary's letter with his resignation, to give up the thankless fight and return—to what?

Jim could not picture for himself any work or life but that which he was doing; could not by the utmost effort of imagination separate himself from his job. His mind went back to Charlie Tuck. He wondered what Charlie would have said to the Secretary's letter. It seemed to Jim that Charlie had had more imagination than he. Perhaps Charlie would have been able to have helped him now. Then he thought of Iron Skull and of that last interrupted talk with him. What had Iron Skull planned to say? What had he foreseen that Jim had been unable to see? It seemed to Jim that he would have given a year of his life to know what advice had been in his old friend's mind.

A useless death! A life too soon withdrawn! Suddenly Jim's whole heart rose in

longing for his friend and in loyalty to him. His death must not be useless! The simple sweetness of the sacrifice must not go unrewarded. His life would not be ended!

Jim looked far over the glistening, glowing night and registered a vow. So help him God, he would not die childless and forlorn as Iron Skull had done. Some day, some way, he would marry Penelope. And somehow he would make the dam a success, that in it Iron Skull's last record of achievement might live forever.

Strangely comforted, Jim went home.

The Secretary's letter remained unanswered for several days. The next morning Henderson reported that a section of the abutments showed signs of decomposition. At the first suggestion of a technical problem with which to wrestle, Jim thrust the Secretary's elusive one aside. He started for the dam site eagerly, and refused to think again that day of the shadow that haunted his work.

In excavating for the abutments a thick stratum of shale had been exposed that air-slaked as fast as it was uncovered. Jim gave orders that drifts be driven through the stratum until a safe distance from possible exposure was reached. These were to be filled with concrete immediately. It was careful and important work. The concrete of the dam must have a solid wall to which to tie and drift after drift must be driven and filled to supply this wall. Jim would trust no one's judgment but his own in this work. He stayed on the dam all the morning, watching the shale and rock and directing the foremen.

At noon he went to the lower mess where he could talk with the masonry workers. Five hundred workmen were polishing off their plates in the great room. Jim chuckled as he sat down with Henderson at one of the long tables.

"If I could get the *hombres* to work as fast as they eat," he said, "I could take a year off the allotted time for the dam."

The masonry workers and teamsters at whose table Jim was sitting grinned.

"There's only one form of persuasion to use with an *hombre*," commented Henderson, gently. "There's just one kind of efficiency he gets, outside of whisky."

"What kind is that?" asked a teamster.

"The kind you get with a good hickory pick-handle across his skull," said Henderson in a tender, meditative way as he took down half a cup of coffee at a gulp. "I've worked hombres in Mexico and in South America and in America. You must never trust 'em. Just when you get where their politeness has smoothed you down, look out for a knife in your back. I never managed to make friends for but one bunch of hombres."

Henderson reached for the coffee pot and a fresh instalment of beef and waited patiently while Jim talked with the master mason. Finally Jim said: "Go ahead with the story, Jack. I know you'll have heartburn if you don't!"

"It was in Arizona," began Henderson. The singing quality in his voice was as tender as a girl's. "I had fifty hombres building a bridge over a draw, getting ready for a mining outfit. No whites for a million miles except my two cart drivers, Ryan and Connors. The hombres and the Irish don't get on well together and I was always expecting trouble.

"One day I was in the tent door when Ryan ran up the trail and beckoned me with his arm. I started on the run. When I got to the draw I saw the fifty hombres altogether pounding something with their shovels. I grabbed up a spade and dug my way through to the middle."

Henderson's voice was lovingly reminiscent. "There I found Ryan and Connors in bad shape. Connors had backed his cart over an *hombre* and the whole bunch had started in to kill him. Ryan had run for me and then gone in to help his friend. I used the spade freely and then dragged the two Irishmen down to the river and stuck their heads in. When they came to, they were both for starting in to kill all the hombres. I argued with 'em but 'twas no use, so I had to hit 'em over the head with a pick-handle and put 'em to sleep. Then I went back and subdued the hombres to tears with the same weapon."

"Did you ever have any more trouble?" asked a man.

"Trouble?" said Henderson, gently. "They didn't know but a word or two of English, but from that time on they always called me 'Papa'!"

Jim roared with the rest and said as he rose, "If you think you've absorbed enough pie to ward off famine, let's get back to the dam."

Henderson followed the Big Boss meekly. They started up the road in silence, Jim leading his horse. Suddenly Jack pulled off his hat and ran his fingers

through his bush of hair.

"Boss," he said, "I chin a lot to keep me cheered up while I finish Iron Skull's job. I wish he could have stayed to finish it. Of course he helped on the Makon but he never had as good a job as he's got here. Ain't it hell when a man goes without a trace of anything living behind him! A man ought to have kids even if he don't have ideas. I often told Iron Skull that. But he said he couldn't ask a woman to live the way he had to. I always told him a woman would stand anything if you loved her enough."

Jim nodded. Iron Skull's life in many ways seemed a personal reproach to Jim for his own way of living.

The work at the abutments absorbed Jim until late afternoon; absorbed him and cheered him. About five o'clock he started off to call on Pen, and tell her about the Secretary's letter. He found her plodding up the road toward the tent house with a pile of groceries in her arms.

"I missed the regular delivery," she replied to his protests as he took the packages from her, "and I love to go down to the store, shopping. It's like a glorified cross-roads emporium. All the hombres and their wives and the 'rough-necks' and their wives and the Indians. Why it's better than a bazaar!"

Jim laughed. "Pen, you are a good mixer. You ought to have my job. You'd make more of it than I do."

"That reminds me," said Pen. "Jim, that man Fleckenstein is going to run for United States Senator. He's going to promise the ranchers that he'll get the government to remit the building charges on the dam. Will that hurt you?"

"Where did you hear this?" asked Jim.

"Fleckenstein and Oscar came up this morning and they talked it over with Oscar. Sara was guarded in what he said before me, but I believe he's going to get campaign money back East. Why should he, Jim?"

She eyed Jim anxiously. There was hardly a moment of the day that the thought of the responsibility that Iron Skull had placed on her shoulders was not with her. But she was resolved to say nothing to Jim until she had a vital suggestion to make to him.

Jim looked at the shimmering lavenders and grays of the desert. It had come. A

frank step toward repudiation. A blow at the fundamental idea of the Service. That was to be the next move of the Big Enemy. And what had Sara to do with it? All thought of the Secretary's letter left Jim. He must see Sara. But Penelope must not be unduly worried. He turned to her with his flashing smile.

"Some sort of peanut politics, Pen. Is Sara alone now? I'll go talk to him."

As if in answer Sara's voice came from the tent which they were almost upon. "Pen, come here!"

Pen did not quicken her pace. "I don't like to change speeds going up a steep grade," she called.

"You hustle when I call you!" roared Sara.

Jim pulled the reins off his arm and dropped them to the ground over the horse's head, the simple process which hitches a desert horse. He left Pen with long strides and entered the tent.

"Sara, if I hear you talk to Pen that way again, I don't care if you are forty times a cripple, I'll punch your face in! What's the matter with you, anyhow? Did your tongue get a twist with your back?"

"Get out of here!" shouted Sara.

Jim recovered his poise at the sight of Pen's anxious eyes. "Now Sweetness," he said to Sara, "don't hurry me! You make me so nervous when you speak that way to me! I think I'll get a burro up here for you to talk to. He'd understand the richness of your vocabulary. Look here now, Sara, we all know you're having a darned hard time and there isn't anything we wouldn't do for you. Don't you realize that Pen is sacrificing her whole life to being your nurse girl? Don't you think you ought to make it as easy for her as you can?"

"Easy!" mocked Sara. "Easy for anyone that can walk and run and come and go? What consideration do they need?"

Pen and Jim winced a little. There was a whole world of tragedy in Sara's mockery. He looked fat and middle-aged. His hair was graying fast. His fingers trembled a good deal although the strength in his arms still was prodigious. Yet Pen and Jim both had a sense of resentment that Sara should take his life tragedy so ill, a feeling that he was indecorous in flaunting his bitterness in their faces. As if he sensed their resentment, Sara went on sneeringly:

"Easy for you two, with your youth and good looks and health to patronize me and fancy how much more decently you could die than I. I wish the two of you were chained to my inert body. How sweet and patient you would be! Bah! You weary me. Pen, will you go over to Mrs. Flynn's for the root beer she promised me?"

Pen made her escape gladly. When she was out of hearing Jim said, "Sara, why do you want the building charges repudiated?"

"Who said I wanted them repudiated?" asked Sara.

"A tent is a poor place to hold secrets," replied Jim. "Did you come here to do me dirt, Sara? Did I ever do you any harm?"

Sara turned purple. He raised himself on his elbow. "Why," he shouted, "did you destroy my chances with Pen by getting her love? You wanted it only to discard it!"

CHAPTER XVII

TOO LATE FOR LOVE

"Honor is the thing that makes humans different from dogs—some dogs! When women have it, it is mingled always with tenderness."

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

Jim jumped to his feet and took a stride toward Sara's couch, then checked himself.

"Oh, I'm not accusing you of planning the thing!" sneered Sara. "I'd have more respect for you if you had. Pen doesn't know that I know. If I hadn't got hurt I'd probably never dreamed of it. Pen and I would have raised a family and I'd have had no time to think of you. But it didn't take more than a year of lying on my back and watching her to see that it was more than my crippled condition that was changing Pen. Damn you! Why should you have it all, health and success and Pen's love? I'll get you yet, Jim Manning!"

Jim stood with his arms folded fighting desperately to keep his hands off Sara. Deep in his heart Jim realized, there was none of the pity for Sara's physical condition that civilized man is supposed to feel for the cripple. Far within him was the loathing of the savage for something abnormal; the loathing that once left the physically unfit to die. Yet superimposed on this loathing was the veneer of civilization, that forces kindness and gentleness and self-denial toward the fit that the unfit may be kept alive.

So Jim gripped his biceps and ground his teeth and the crippled man in the chair stared with bitter black eyes into Jim's angry gray ones. Jim fought with himself until the sweat came out on his lips, then without a word he left the tent, mounted his horse and rode back to the dam site.

He wanted time to think. It was very evident that Sara meant mischief, but just how great was his capacity for doing him harm Jim could only guess. The idea of his extremely friendly relations with Arthur Freet bothered Jim now. If Freet were really trying to influence the sale of the water power through Sara, the wise thing to do would be to send Sara back to New York. And yet, if Sara went, Pen

would go, too! Jim's heart sank. He could not bear to think of the dam now without Pen. He squared his shoulders suddenly. He would not send Sara away until he had some real proof that his threats were more than idle. At any rate, it was not his business to worry over the sale of the water power. If he produced the power he was doing his share. And when he had fallen back on his old excuse Jim gave a sigh of relief and went home to supper.

Henderson was in the office the next morning when Jim opened a letter from the Director of the Service. He was sorry, said the director, that there had been so much loss of time and property in the flood. He realized, of course, that Jim had done his best, but people who did not know him so well would not have the same confidence. The Congressional Committee on Investigation of the Projects, on receipt of numerous complaints regarding the flood, had decided to proceed at once to Jim's project and there begin its work.

Jim tossed the Director's letter to Henderson and laid aside the Secretary's letter, which he had planned to answer that morning.

"More time wasted!" grumbled Jim. "There will be a hearing and talky-talk and I must listen respectfully while the abutments crumble. Why in thunder don't they send a good engineer or two along with the Congressmen? A report from such a committee would have value. How would Congress enjoy having a committee of engineers passing on the legality of the work it does?"

Henderson laid the letter down, rumpling his hair. "Hell's fire!" he said gently. "My past won't stand investigating. You ask the Missis if it will! I'm safe if they stick to Government projects and stay away from the mining camps and the ladies."

Jim's eyes twinkled. "Perhaps your past is black enough to whiten mine in contrast. I'll ask Mrs. Henderson."

Henderson suddenly brightened. "I've got a dying favor to ask of you. Let me take the fattest of 'em to ride in Bill Evans' auto?"

Jim looked serious. "Your past must have been black, all right, Jack! You show a naturally vicious disposition. Really, I haven't anything personal against these men. It's just that they take so much time and insist on treating us fellows as if we were pickpockets."

"I ain't as ladylike as you," said Henderson, in his tender way. "I just naturally

hate to be investigated. My Missis does all that I can stand. I won't do anything vicious, though. I'll just show a friendly interest in them. I might lasso 'em and hitch 'em behind the machine, but that might hurt it and, anyhow, that wouldn't be subtle enough. These here Easterners like delicate methods. I do myself. At least, I appreciate them. The delicatest attention I ever had that might come under the head of an investigation was by an Eastern lady. It was years ago on an old irrigation ditch. Her husband was starting a ranch and I caught him stealing water. I was pounding him up when she landed on me with a steel-pronged garden rake. She raked me till I had to borrow clothes from her to go home with. That sure was some delicate investigation."

"The world lost a great lyric soloist in you, Jack," commented Jim. "Jokes aside, it's fair enough for them to investigate us. If the members of the committee are straight, it ought to do a lot toward stopping this everlasting kicking of the farmers. We've nothing to fear but the delay they cause."

Jack sighed regretfully. "Well, I'll be good, if you insist. Let's give 'em a masquerade ball while they're here."

"Good," said Jim. "Will you take charge?"

"Bet your life!" replied Henderson, whose enthusiasm for social affairs had never flagged since the day of the reception to the Director, up on the Makon.

Jim spent a heavy morning on the dam, climbing about, testing and calculating. Already the forms were back in place ready to restore the concrete swept away by the flood. Excavation for the next section of the foundation was proceeding rapidly. At mid-afternoon, Jim was squatting on a rock overlooking the excavation when Oscar Ames appeared.

"Mr. Manning," he said angrily, "that main ditch isn't being run as near my house as I want it. You'd better move it now, before I make you move it."

"Go to my irrigation engineer, Mr. Ames," replied Jim shortly. "He has my full confidence."

"Well, he hasn't mine nor nobody's else's in the valley, with his darned dude pants! I am one of the oldest farmers in this community. I had as much influence as anybody at getting the Service in here and I propose to have my place irrigated the way I want it."

"By the way," said Jim, "you folks use too much water for your own good, since

the diversion dam was finished. Why do you use three times what you ought to just because you can get it from the government free? Don't you know you'll ruin your land with alkali?"

Ames looked at Jim in utter disgust. "Did you ever run an irrigated farm? Did you ever see a ditch till eight years ago? Didn't you get your education at a darned East college where they wouldn't know a ditch from the Atlantic Ocean?"

"Look here, Ames," said Jim, "do you know that you are the twelfth farmer who has been up here and told me he'd get me dismissed if we didn't put the ditch closer to his ranch? I tell you as I've told them that we've placed the canal where we had to for the lie of the land and where it would do the greatest good to the greatest number when the project was all under cultivation. Some of you will have to dig longer and some shorter ditches. I can't help that. Isn't that reasonable?"

"It would be," sniffed Ames, "if you knew enough to know where the best place was. That's where you fall down. You won't take advice. Just because I don't wear short pants and leather shin guards is no reason I'm a fool."

Jim's drawl was very pronounced. "The shin guards would help you when you clear cactus. And if you'd adopt a leather headguard, it would protect you in your favorite job of butting in."

"I'll get you yet!" exclaimed Ames, starting off rapidly toward the trail. "I've got pull that'll surprise you."

Jim swore a little under his breath and began again on his interrupted calculations. When the four o'clock whistle blew and the shifts changed, some one sat down silently near Jim. Jim worked on for a few moments, finishing his problem. Then he looked up. Suma-theek was sitting on a rock, smoking and watching Jim.

"Boss," he began, "you sabez that story old Suma-theek tell you?"

Jim nodded. "Why don't you do it, then?" the old Indian went on.

Jim looked puzzled. Suma-theek jerked his thumb toward the distant tent house. "She much beautiful, much lonely, much young, much good. Why you no marry her?"

"She is married, Suma-theek," replied Jim gently.

"Married? No! That no man up there. She no his wife. Let him go. He bad in heart like in body. You marry her."

Jim continued to shake his head. "She belongs to him. The law says so."

Suma-theek snorted. "Law! You whites make no law except to break it. Love it have no law except to make tribe live. Great Spirit, he must think she bad when she might have good babies for her tribe, she stay with that bad cripple. Huh?"

"You don't understand, Suma-theek. There is always the matter of honor for a white man."

Suma-theek smoked his cigarette thoughtfully for a moment and then he said, wonderingly: "A white man's honor! He will steal a nigger woman or an Injun woman. He will steal Injun money or Injun lands. He will steal white man's money. He will lie. He will cheat. Where he not afraid, white man no have honor. But when talk about steal white man's wife, he afraid. Then he find he have honor! Honor! Boss, white honor is like rain on hot sand, like rotten arrow string, like leaking olla. I am old, old Injun. I heap know white honor!"

Old Suma-theek flipped his cigarette into the excavation and strode away. Jim rose slowly and looked over at the Elephant with his gray eyes narrowed, his broad shoulders set.

"On your head be it!" he murmured. "I am going to try!"

He climbed the trail to his house, washed and brushed himself and went over to the tent house. Pen was sitting on the doorstep. Oscar Ames was talking to Sara.

"Hello, Sara!" said Jim coolly. "Pen, I've got a free hour. Will you come up back of the camp with me and let me show you the view from Wind Ridge? It's finer than what you get from the Elephant."

Sara's face was inscrutable. Oscar said nothing. Pen laid aside her book and picked up her hat.

"I knew there was something the matter with me," she said gaily. "It was Wind Ridge I was missing though I never heard of it before! I won't be long, Sara."

"Don't hurry on my account," said Sara, with a sardonic glance at Jim.

The trail led up the mountain slope with a steady twist toward a ridge at the top that showed a sawtooth edge. Almost to the top the mountain was dotted with

little green cedars, dwarfed and wind-tortured. Up at the saw edge they stopped. Here the wind caught them, wind flooding across desert and mountain, clean, sweet, with a marvelous tang to it, despite the desert heat.

"Why, it's a world of lavenders!" cried Pen.

Jim nodded and steadied her against the great warm rush of the wind. Far to the east beyond the purple Elephant the San Juan mountains lay on the horizon. They were the faintest, clearest blue lavender, with iridescent peaks merging into the iridescent sky. The desert that swept toward the Elephant was a yellow lavender. The mountain that bore the ridge was a gray lavender. To the west, three great ranges vied with each other in melting tints of purple, that now were blue, now were lavender. The two might have been sitting at the top of the world, the sweep of the view and the sense of exaltation in it were so great.

Mighty white clouds rushed across the sky, sweeping their blue shadows over the desert, like ripples in the wake of huge sailing ships.

When Pen had looked her fill, Jim led her to a clump of cedars that broke the wind and made a seat for her from branches. Then he tossed his hat down and stood before her. Pen looked up into his face.

"Why so serious, Still Jim?" she asked.

"Penelope," asked Jim, "do you remember that twice I held you in my arms and kissed you on the lips and told you that you belonged to me?"

Pen whitened. If he could only dream how the pain and sweetness of those embraces never had left her!

"I remember! But let's not talk of that. We settled it all on the day you got back from Washington. We must forget it all, Jim."

"We can never forget it, Pen. We're not that kind." Jim stood struggling for words with which to express his emotion. It always had been this way, he told himself. The great moments of his life always found him dumb. Even old Suma-theek could tell his thoughts more clearly than he. Jim summoned all his resources.

"Pen, it never occurred to me you wouldn't wait. There has never been any other woman in my life and I suppose I just couldn't picture any other man having a hold on you. But it all goes in with my general incompetence to grasp opportunity. I felt that I had no right to go any farther until I had more than

hopes to offer you. I planned to make a reputation as an engineer. I knew money didn't interest you. I wanted to offer myself to you as a man of real achievement. You see how I failed. I have made a reputation as a grafting, inefficient engineer with the public. You are another man's wife. But, Penelope, I am not going to give you up!

"One gets a new view of life out here. You are wrong in staying with Saradokis. Why should three lives be ruined by his tragedy? Pen! Pen! If I could make you understand the torture of knowing you are married to Sara! You are mine! From the first day I came upon you in the old library, we belonged to each other. Pen, I've tramped the desert night after night on the Makon and here, sweating it out with the stars and I have determined that you shall belong to me."

Pen, white and trembling, did not move her gaze from Jim's face. All her tired, yearning youth stood in her eyes.

Jim spoke very slowly and clearly. "Penelope, I love you. Will you leave Saradokis and marry me?"

Pen did not answer for a long moment. A to-hee trilled from the cedar:

> "O yahee! O yahai!
> Sweet as arrow weed in spring!"

The Elephant lay motionless. The flag rippled and fluttered, a faint red spot far below on the mountainside. Pen's youth was fighting with her bitterly won philosophy. Then she summoned all her fortitude.

"Jim, dear, it would be a cowardly thing for me to leave Sara."

"It would be greater cowardice to stay. Pen, shall you and I die as Iron Skull did? I can marry no other woman feeling as I do about you. Sara's life is useless. Let the world say what it will. Marry me, Penelope."

"Jim, I can't."

"Why not, Penelope?"

"I love you very dearly, but I've had enough of marriage. I've done my duty. I don't see how I could keep on loving a man after I married him, even if he weren't a cripple. The process of adjustment is simply frightful. Marriage is just a contract binding one to do the impossible!"

Jim scowled. More and more he was realizing how Sara had hurt Pen.

"You don't care a rap about me, Pen. Why don't you admit it?"

Pen gave a sudden tearful smile. "You know better, Jim. But just to prove to you what a silly goose I am, I'll show you something. Girls in real life do this even more than they do it in novels!"

Pen opened a flat locket she always wore. A folded bit of paper and a tiny photograph fluttered into her lap. She gave both to Jim. The picture was a snapshot of Jim in his football togs. The bit of paper, unfolded, showed in Pen's handwriting a verse from Christina Rossetti:

> "Too late for love, too late for joy;
> Too late! Too late!
> You loitered on the road too long,
> You trifled at the gate:
> The enchanted dove upon her branch
> Died without a mate:
> The enchanted princess in her tower
> Slept, died, behind the grate:
> Her heart was starving all this time
> You made it wait."

Jim put the bit of paper into his pocket and gave Pen the picture. His eyes were full of tears.

"Pen! Pen!" he cried. "Let me make it up to you! We care so much! Suppose we aren't always happy. Oh, my love, a month of life with you would make me willing to bear all the spiritual drudgery of marriage!"

White to the lips, Pen answered once more: "Jim, I will never leave Sara. There is such a thing as honor. It's the last foundation that the whole social fabric rests on. I promised to stay with Sara, in the marriage service. He's kept his word. It's my business to keep mine, until he breaks his."

Jim stood with set face. "Is this final, Penelope?"

"It's final, Still."

"Do you mind if I go on alone, Pen?"

Pen shook her head and Jim turned down the mountainside. And Pen, being a woman, put her head down on her knees and cried her heart out. Then she went back to Sara.

That night Jim answered the Secretary's letter:

"My work has always been technical. I know that the Projects are not the success their sponsors in Congress hoped they would be, but I feel that you ask too much of your engineers when you ask them not only to make the dam but to administer it. I have about concluded that an engineer is a futile beast of triangles and *n*-th powers, unfitted by his very talents for associating with other human beings. I suppose that this letter must be interpreted as my admission of inefficiency."

It was late when Jim had finished this letter. He was, he thought, alone in the house. He laid down his pen. A sudden overpowering desire came upon him for Exham, for the old haunts of his childhood. There it seemed to him that some of his old confidence in life might return to him. He dropped his arm along the back of his chair and with his forehead on his wrist he gave a groan of utter desolation.

Mrs. Flynn, coming in at the open door, heard the groan and saw the beautiful brown head bowed as if in despair. She stopped aghast.

"Oh, my Lord!" she gasped under her breath. "Him, too! Mrs. Penelope ain't the only one that's broken up, then! Ain't it fierce! I wonder what's happened to the poor young ones! I'd like to go to Mr. Sara's wake. I would that! Oh, my Lord! Let's see. He's had two baths today. I can't get him into another. I'll make him some tea. You have to cheer up either to eat or take a bath."

She slipped into the kitchen and there began to bang the range and rattle teacups. When she came in, Jim was sitting erect and stern-faced, sorting papers. Mrs. Flynn set the tray down on the desk with a thud. She was going to take no refusal.

"Drink that tea, Boss Still Jim, and eat them toasted crackers. You didn't eat any supper to speak of and you're as pindlin' as a knitting needle. Don't slop on your clean suit. That khaki is hard to iron."

She stood close beside him and made an imaginary thread an excuse for laying her hand caressingly on Jim's shoulder. "You're a fine lad," she said, uncertainly. "I wish I'd been your mother."

The touch was too much for Jim. He dropped the teacup and, turning, laid his face against Mrs. Flynn's shoulder.

"I could pretend you were tonight, very easily," he said brokenly, "if you'd smooth my hair for me."

Mrs. Flynn hugged the broad shoulders to her and smoothed back Jim's hair.

"I've been wanting to get my hands on it ever since I first saw it, lad. God knows it's as soft as silk and just the color of oak leaves in winter. There, now, hold tight a bit, my boy. We can weather any storm if we have a friend to lean on, and I'm that, God knows. It's a fearful cold I've caught, God knows. You'll have to excuse my snuffing. There now! There! God knows that in my waist I've got a letter for you from Mrs. Penelope. She seemed used up tonight. Her jewel of a husband took dope tonight, so she and I sat in peace while she wrote this. I'll leave it on your tray. Good-night to you, Boss. Don't slop on your suit."

CHAPTER XVIII

JIM MAKES A SPEECH

"I am permanent so I cannot fully understand the tragedy that haunts humans from their birth, the tragedy of their own transitoriness."

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

Jim drank his tea, staring the while at the envelope that lay on the tray. Then he opened the envelope and read:

"DEAR STILL: Don't say that I must go away. I want to stay and help you. I promised Iron Skull that I would. I don't want to add one breath to your pain—nor to my own!—and yet I feel as if we ought to forget ourselves and think only of the dam. No one knows you as I do, dear Jim. Iron Skull felt, and so do I, that somehow, sometime I can help you to be the big man you were meant to be. I have grown to feel that it was for that purpose I have lived through the last eight years. If it will not hurt you too much, please, Jim, let me stay.

PENELOPE."

Jim answered the note immediately.

"DEAREST PEN: Give me a day or so to get braced and we will go on as before. Stand by me, Pen. I need you, dear.

JIM."

But it was nearly two weeks before Jim talked with Pen again. For a number of days he devoted himself day and night to the preparations for starting the second section of the dam in the completed excavation. Then formal notice came that the Congressional committee would arrive at the dam nearly a week before it had been expected and Jim was overwhelmed in preparations for its reception. The first three days of the investigation were to be devoted to inspecting the dam. Jim brought the committee to the dam from the station himself.

There were five men on the committee, two New Englanders and three far westerners. They were the same five men who a year before had investigated

Arthur Freet's projects and they were baffled and suspicious. And Jim's silence irritated them far more than Arthur Freet's loquacity. The members from the West and from Massachusetts were, in spite of this, open-minded, eager for information and interested in the actual work of the dam building. The member from Vermont pursued Jim with the bitterness of a fanatic.

"A Puritan hang-over is what ails him," Jim remarked to Henderson. "He would burn a woman for a witch for having three moles on her back, as easy as—as he'd fire me!"

Henderson snorted: "I wish he was fat. I'd take him to ride in Bill Evans' machine. But, gee! he's so thin he'd stick in the seat like a sliver!"

Henderson had devoted himself to the entertainment of the visitors. He had organized a picnic to a far canyon where the "officers" and their wives offered the committee a wonderful camp supper, by a camp fire that lighted the desert for miles. He had induced the Mexicans in the lower camp to give one of their religious plays for the second night's entertainment. The moving picture hall was turned into a theater and the play, in queer Spanish, a strange mixture of miracle-play and buffoonery, delighted the hombres and astounded the whites. But the consummation of Henderson's art as an entertainment provider was to be the Mask Ball. This was to take place after the hearing at Cabillo was finished.

Jim gave all his time to the committee. He turned the office and its force over to them; gave them the freedom of the account books and the safe. Let them rummage the warehouse and its system. Explained his engineering mistakes to them. Went over and over the details of the flood, of the weathering abutments, of the concrete that did not come up to specifications, of the new system of concrete mixture that he and his cement engineer were evolving and which Jim believed in so ardently that he was using it on the dam. But in regard to Freet or to any graft in the Service he was persistently silent.

The Hearing was like and yet unlike the May hearing. It lacked the dignity of the first occasion and the Vermont member who presided was not the calm, inscrutable judge that the Secretary had been. The hall in Cabillo was packed with farmers and their wives and sweethearts and with Del Norte citizens.

The main effort of the speakers at the Hearing was to prove the inordinate extravagance and incompetence of Jim and his associates. For three days Jim answered questions quietly and as briefly as possible. But he was not able to compass the cool indifference that had kept him staring out the window of the

Interior Department. There was growing within him an overwhelming desire to protest. He saw that, however fair the other members of the committee were inclined to be, their certainty of Freet's dishonesty, coupled with the fact that he was a pupil of Freet's, would be used by the restless vindictiveness of the Vermont member without doubt, to bring about his dismissal.

He felt an increasing desire to make a last stand against the wall of the nation's indifference, to make the people of the Project and the people of the world understand his viewpoint. But words failed him until the last day of the Hearing.

On this last day, Sara and Pen attended the hearing, as guests of Fleckenstein, who had sent his great touring car for them. Jim nodded to them across the room but made no attempt to speak to them. It was nearing five o'clock when Fleckenstein closed his testimony.

"The Reclamation Service," he said, "is like every other department of the government. It is a refuge for the incompetent whose one skill is in grafting. The cost of this dam has jumped over the estimates by hundreds of thousands. Forty dollars an acre is what the farmers of this project must pay the government instead of the estimated thirty. I do not lay the whole blame on Mr. Manning, even though he is Freet's pupil. Part of it is due to the criminal ignorance and weakness of Mr. Manning's predecessor. We farmers——"

"Stop!" thundered Jim. He jumped to his feet. Fleckenstein gasped. Jim threw back his hair. His gray eyes were black. His thin brown face was flushed. Under his khaki riding suit his long steel muscles were tense.

"My predecessor was Frederick Watts. I grew to know him well. He was a master mind in his profession, but he was gentle and sensitive and, like many men who have lived long in the open, silent. About the time that he started to build this dam the money interests in this country decided that the nation was getting too much water power control. They decided that the best way to stop the nation's growth in this direction was to discredit the Service. Frederick Watts was one of their first targets. By means too subtle for me to understand, they set machinery going in this vicinity by which every step that Watts took was made a kick against him.

"They never let up on him. They hounded him. They put him to shame with the nation and in the privacy of his own family. Watts was over fifty years old. He was no fighter. All he wanted was a chance to build his dam. He was gentle and silent. He went into nervous prostration and died, still silent, a broken-hearted

man.

"Up in the big silent places you will find his monuments; dams high in mountain fastnesses, an imperishable part of the mountains; trestles that bridge canyons which birds feared to cross. He spent his life in utter hardships making ways easy for others to follow. These monuments will stand forever. But the name of their builder has become a blackened thing for rats like Fleckenstein to handle with dirty claws.

"And now they are after me. And you, many of you, in this audience, are the sometimes innocent and sometimes paid instruments of my downfall. You accuse me of grafting, of lying and stealing. You don't understand."

Jim paused and moistened his lips. The room was breathless. Pen could hear her heart beat. She dug her fingernails into her palm. Could he, *could* he find the words? Even if these people did not understand, could he not say something that would teach her how to help him? Jim did not see the crowded room. Before him was his father's dying face and Iron Skull's. His hands felt their dying fingers.

"I am a New Englander. My people came to New England 250 years ago and fought the wilderness for a home. We were Anglo-Saxons. We were trail makers, lawmakers, empire builders. We founded this nation. We threw open the doors to the world and then we were unable to withstand the flood that answered our invitation. The New Englander in America is as dead as the Indian or the buffalo. My people have failed and died with the rest. I am the last of my line.

"But I have the craving of my ancestry with something more. I can see the tragedy of my race. I know that the day will come when the civilization of America will be South European; that our every institution will be altered to suit the needs of the South European and Asiatic mind.

"I want to leave an imperishable Anglo-Saxon thumb print on the map; a thumb print that no future changes can obliterate, a thumb print that shall be less transitory than the pyramids because it will be a part of the fundamental needs of a people as long as they hunger or thirst.

"Look at the roster of the Reclamation Service. You will find it a roster of men whom the old vision has sent into dam building and road making. Here in the Service you will find the last stand of the Anglo-Saxon trail makers.

"I want to build this dam. I want to build it so that, by God, it shall be standing

and delivering water when the law that makes it possible shall have passed from the memory of man! And you won't let me build it. You, some of you Anglo-Saxons yourselves, destined to be obliterated as I shall be, are fighting me. You say that I am *stealing*. I, fighting to leave a thumb print!"

Jim dropped into his seat and for a moment there was such silence in the room that the palm leaves outside the window could be heard rattling softly in the breeze. Then there broke forth a great round of handclapping, and during this Jim slipped out. He was not much deceived by the applause. He knew that it would take more than a burst of eloquence to overcome the influences at work against the Service.

He returned to the dam that night, Pen and Sara came up the next day and that evening Jim went over to call. It was his first word with Pen since the walk to Wind Ridge. He found Sara sleeping heavily. Pen greeted him casually.

"Hello, Still! Sara was suffering so frightfully after his trip that he took his morphine. It was insane of him to go to the Hearing, but he would do it. Sit down. We won't disturb him a bit."

She pulled the blanket over the unconscious man in her usual tender way.

"You are mighty good to him, Pen," said Jim.

"I try to be. I guess I'm as good to him as he'll let me be, poor fellow. Jim, he was fine in his college days, wasn't he?"

"I never saw a more magnificent physique," answered Jim. "He was a great athlete and I used to believe he was a greater financier than Morgan."

Pen looked at Jim gratefully. "And if it hadn't been for the accident he would have been just as easy to get along with as the average man."

Jim chuckled. "I don't know whether that's a compliment to Sara or an insult to the average man. What have you done with yourself during the investigation?"

"Taken care of Sara, communed with my soul and the laundry problem and had several nice talks with Jane Ames. She is a dear."

Jim nodded. Then he pulled the Secretary's letter from his pocket with a copy of his own answer and handed them to Pen. "I've come for advice and comment," he said.

Pen read both and her cheeks flushed. "Have you sent your answer?"

Jim nodded.

Pen stared at him a moment with her mouth open, then she said, with heartfelt sincerity, "Jim, I'm perfectly disgusted with you!"

Jim gasped.

"Like the average descendant of the Puritan," Pen sniffed, "you are lying down on your job. Thank God, I'm Irish!"

"Gee, Pen, you're actually cross!"

"I am! If I were not a perfect lady I'd slap you and put my tongue out at you, anything that would adequately express my disdain! For pig-headed bigotry, bounded on the north by high principles and on the south by big dreams, give me a New Englander! You make me tired!"

"For the Lord's sake, Pen!"

Pen laid down her bit of sewing and looked at Jim long and earnestly, then she said, quietly, "Jim, why don't you go to work?"

Jim looked flushed and bewildered. "I work eighteen hours a day."

Pen groaned. "I'm talking about your capacity, not your output. You are only using half of what is in you, Still. You build the dam and you refuse to do anything else. Why, with your kind of creative, engineering mind, you are perfectly capable of administering the dam, too. Of handling all the problems connected with it in a cool, scientific way that would come very near being ideal justice. You know that the projects are an experiment in government activity. You know that the people who will control them have no experience or training that will fit them for handling the projects. Yet you refuse to help them. You are just as stupid and just as selfish as if you had built a complicated machine and had turned it over to children to run, refusing them all explanation or guidance."

Pen paused, breathless, her cheeks scarlet, her eyes glowing. Jim watched her, his face pitifully eager. Perhaps, he thought, Pen was actually going to lay her finger on the cause of his inadequacy.

"Instead of antagonizing every farmer on the Project, you ought to be making them feel that you are their partner and friend in a mighty difficult business. You

told us yesterday that your ancestors not only made the trail but also the law of the trail. What are you doing? It's your own fault if you lose your job, Still!"

Pen got up and turned Sara's pillow and shaded the light from his face, mechanically.

"You are just like all the rest of what you call the Anglo-Americans. You go about feeling superior and abused and calling the immigrants hard names. You are just a lot of quitters. You have refused national service. If you *are* a dying race and you *are* convinced that the world can't afford to lose your institutions, how low down you are not to feel that your last duty to society is to show by personal example the value of your institutions."

"I don't see what I can do," protested Jim.

"That's just what I'm trying to show you," retorted Pen. "I have to plow through your ignorance first—clear the ground, you know! After you Anglo-Americans founded the government most of you went to money making and left it to be administered by people who were racially and traditionally different from you. You left your immigration problems to sentimentalists and money-makers. You left the law-making to money-makers. You refused to serve the nation in a disinterested, future-seeing way which was your duty if you wanted your institutions to live. You descendants of New England are quitters. And you are going to lose your dam because of that simple fact."

Jim began to pace the floor. "Did you ever talk this over with Uncle Denny, Penelope?"

"No!" she gave a scornful sniff. "If ever I had dared to criticize you, he'd have turned me out of the house. No one can live in New York and not think a great deal about immigration problems. And—I have been with you much in the past eight years, Jimmy. I can't tell you how much I have thought about you and your work. And then, just before old Iron Skull was killed, he turned you over to me."

Jim paused before her. "He was worried about you, too," she went on. "He said you were not getting the big grasp on things that you ought and that I must help you."

"I wonder if that was what he was trying to tell me when he was killed," said Jim. "The dear old man! Go on, Pen."

"I've just this much more to say, Jim, and that is that if the Reclamation Service

idea fails, it's more the fault of you engineers than of anyone else. The sort of thing you engineers do on the dam is typical of the Anglo-American in the whole country. You are quitters!"

"Pen, don't you say that again!" exclaimed Jim, sharply. "I'm doing all I can!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE MASK BALL

"I have seen in the coyote pack that coyotes who will not hunt and fight for the pack must starve and die."

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

"You are not!" returned Pen flatly. "You don't see the human side of your problem at all. You have made Oscar Ames hate you. Yet no man could live the life and do the things that Oscar has and not have developed a fine big side to his nature. You never see that. And the dam is more Oscar's than it is yours. It is *for* him. Still, somehow you have got to make every farmer on the Project your partner. Make them feel that you and the dam are theirs. Show them how to take care of the things the dam will produce. Jim, dear, make your thumb print in the hearts of men as well as in concrete, if you would have your work endure."

Jim paced the floor steadily. Old visions were passing before his eyes. Once more he saw the degraded mansions on the elm-shaded streets. Old Exham, with its lost ideals. Ideals of what? Was Pen right? Was it the ideal of national responsibility that Exham had lost—the ideal that had built the town meeting house and the public school, that had produced the giants of those early days, giants who had ruled the nation with an integrity long lost to these later times.

"My father said to me, 'Somehow we Americans have fallen down on our jobs!'" said Jim, pausing before Pen, finally. "Pen, I wonder if he would have thought your reason the right one?"

Then he lifted Pen's chin to look long into her eyes. Slowly his wistful smile illumined his face. "Thank you, dear," he said and, turning, he went out into the night.

The next night was given the Mask Ball in honor of the committee. Nobody knew what conclusion the eminent gentleman had reached in regard to Jim and his associates. But everyone did his best to contribute to the hilarity of the occasion.

The gray adobe building where the unmarried office men and engineers lived was gay with colored lights and cedar festoons. The hall in the rear of the building had an excellent dancing floor. The orchestra was composed of three Mexicans—hombres—with mandolins and a guitar, and an Irish rough-neck who brought from the piano a beauty of melody that was like a memory of the Sod. The four men produced dance music that New York might have envied.

Several Cabillo couples attended the dance. Oscar Ames and Jane and one or two other ranchers and their wives were there. All the wives of the officers' camp came and the bachelors searched both the upper and lower camps for partners, with some very charming results. Mrs. Flynn sat with Sara, and Jim insisted that instead of going with Jane and Oscar, as she had planned, that he be allowed to take Pen to the first ball she had attended since her marriage.

Henderson had ordered that the costumes be kept a great secret. Through a Los Angeles firm he provided dominoes for the five committeemen. But there were half a dozen other dominoes at the ball, so the committee quickly lost its identity. Oscar Ames came as a hobo. Henderson had a policeman's uniform, while the two cub engineers wore, one, a cowboy outfit; the other, an Indian chief's. Mrs. Henderson was dressed as a squaw.

Penelope wore a flower girl's costume, improvised from the remains of the chintz she had brought from New York. Jim viewed her with great complaisance. No one could look like Pen, he thought, and he would dance with her all the evening. Jim went as a monk. To his chagrin, when they reached the hall he found that Pen had made Mrs. Ames a costume exactly like her own, and with the complete face masks they wore, they might have been twins. They were just of a height and Mrs. Ames danced well. The children and the phonograph had long ago attended to that.

There was nothing stupid about the ball from the very start. The policeman ended the grand march by arresting the hobo, who put up a fight that included two of the dominoes. The orchestra swung into "La Paloma" and in a moment the hall was full of swaying colors, drifting through the golden desert dust that filled the room. There were twice as many men at the ball as women. The latter were popular to the point of utter exhaustion.

Henderson looked over the tallest domino, seized him by the throat and with wild flourishes of his club, backed him into a corner.

"Say, Boss Still Jim," he whispered, "that old nut of a chairman doesn't look as if he had anything but skim milk in his veins. But do you sabez he's danced three times with that little fat ballet girl and he's hugging the daylights out of her. He'd ought to be investigated."

The tall domino looked at the couple indicated. "I'll start investigating, myself," he whispered.

"Wish I could get a dance with her, but I can't," said Henderson. "My Missis knows who I am. I ain't got her spotted yet, though. Yes, I have. That flower girl's her. I'd know the way she jerks her shoulders anywhere."

He cut neatly in and separated the flower girl from the monk. "Look here, Minnie," he said gently. "You ain't called on to dance like a broncho, you know. Remember, you're the mother of a family! Cut out having too many dances with that monk. He holds you too tight. I think he's one of the committee men. You floss up to the tallest domino and give him a good time. That's the Boss."

The flower girl sniggered and Henderson pushed her from him with marital impatience and took an Indian squaw away from the hobo.

"Come on, little girl," he said. "You can dance all right. If my wife wasn't here I'd show you a time."

The squaw stiffened and the monk swung her away from Jack, who immediately arrested old Dad Robins, the night watchman, who was taking a sly peak off his beat at the festivities. Henderson forced the delighted old man through a waltz, with himself as a very languishing partner.

The hobo, dancing with one of the flower girls, said: "Jane, I've been trying to get a chance to warn you not to say anything to Mrs. Penelope about that deal with Freet. I was a fool to let you see that letter tonight. Now I'm getting into national politics, you've got to learn to keep your mouth shut."

"How'd you know me?" whispered the flower girl.

"You don't dance as good as Mrs. Pen," he replied.

Here the monk stole the flower girl and danced off with her, firmly.

"Remember the dance at Coney Island and how mean you were to me?" he whispered.

"And how bossy and high-handed you were about the bathing? How did you know me?"

The monk hugged the flower girl to him. "You haven't lived in my heart for all these years without my getting to *know* you!"

And the flower girl sighed ecstatically.

The tall domino, dancing with the other flower girl, felt the strains of Espanita creeping up his backbone, and he said,

"There is something in the air out here that is almost intoxicating!"

The flower girl answered: "It'll do more than that for you, if you'll give it a chance. It will make you see things."

"I don't understand you," replied the domino in a dignified way.

"I mean you'd see if you stayed here long enough that what Jim Manning needs is help, not investigating."

"How do you know I'm not Manning?"

The flower girl sniffed. "I'm an old woman so I can tell you that no woman would ever mistake him for anyone else after she'd once danced with him."

"He is making a most regrettable record here," very stiffly from the domino.

"Shucks! Why don't you fire Arthur Freet? I warn you right now that he's trying to get his hooks into this dam."

"The Service might well dispense with both of them, I believe," said the domino.

The flower girl sniffed again. "You politicians—" she began, when she was interrupted by a call at the door.

The music stopped. A white-faced boy had mounted a chair and was shouting hysterically: "Where's the Boss? The hombres have shot my father!"

"It's Dad Robins' boy! Why, the old man was here a bit ago!" cried someone.

The monk pulled off his mask and flung his robe in the corner. "Oscar," he said to the hobo, who had unmasked, "see to Mrs. Penelope."

Then he grasped young Robins by the arm and rushed with him from the hall.

Oscar hurried Pen and Jane up to the tent house with scant ceremony, then ran for the lower town. Mrs. Flynn and Sara were greatly surprised by the early return of the merrymakers. The four waited eagerly for news. Sara would not let any of the women stir from the tent, saying that it was unsafe until they knew what had happened. At midnight Oscar returned.

"They got poor old Dad. After he left the hall, he was going past a lighted tent in the lower town when he heard sounds of a fight. He went in and found two drunken Mexicans fighting over a flask of whiskey. He took the whiskey and told them to go to bed. He started out into the street and the two jumped him and started to stab him to death. He yelled and the sheriff and his boy was the only folks in all that town dared to go help him. The two hombres shot the sheriff in the arm before he located them and got away. They had finished poor old Dad, though. Mr. Manning's got posses out and will start more at daylight. If you'll put Jane up for the night, Mrs. Flynn, I'll go back to the lower town. You'd ought to see those committeemen. Three of them would have gone out with a posse, I'll bet, if they hadn't remembered their dignity in time!"

Jim had his hands full. By daylight the next morning there was every prospect of a wholesale battle between the Americans and the Mexicans. The camp was at fever pitch with excitement. The two shifts not at work swarmed the streets of the lower camp, the Mexicans at the far end, the Americans at the upper end near Dad Robins' house, whence came the sound of an old woman's hard sobs. After a hurried breakfast at the lower mess, Jim joined this crowd. The men circled round him, all talking at once. Jim listened for a time, then he raised his arm for silence. "It was booze did it! Booze and nothing else! Am I right?"

Reluctant nods went around the crowd. "And yet," Jim went on, "there's hardly a white man in the camp who hasn't fought me on my ruling that liquor must not come within the government lines. You all know what booze means in a place like this. Those of you who were with me at Makon know what we suffered from it up there. I know you fellows, decent, kindly men now, in spite of your threats to lynch the hombres. But if you could get booze, you'd make this camp a hell on earth right now. No better than a drunken Mexican is a drunken white. Am I right?"

Again reluctant nods and half-sheepish grins.

"Now, you fellows forget your lynching bee. Commons, Ralston, Schwartz, you make a committee to raise enough money to send Mrs. Robins and the boy back to New Hampshire with the body. Here is ten to start with. They must leave this noon. Tom Weeks, you make the funeral arrangements. I'll see that transportation is ready at noon. Bill Underwood, you get a posse of fifty men and quarantine this camp for booze."

A little laugh went through the crowd. Billy Underwood had been the chief

malcontent under Jim's liquor ruling. Bill did not laugh. He began to pick his men with the manner of a general.

"One word more," said Jim. "You all know that the United States Reclamation Service is under the suspicion of the nation. They call you and me a bunch of grafters. It's up to you as much as it is to me to show today that we are men and not lawless hoboes."

A little murmur of applause swept through the crowd as Jim turned on his heel. He made his way into the Mexican end of the camp. There was noise here of talking and quarreling. Jim walked up to a tall Mexican who was in a way a padrone among the hombres.

"Garces," said Jim, "send the night shift to bed."

Garces eyed Jim through half-shut eyes. Jim did not move a muscle. "Why?" asked the Mexican.

"Because I shall put them to bed unless they are gone in five minutes."

Jim pulled out his watch. In just four minutes, after a shouted order from Garces, the street was cleared of more than half the hombres.

"Now," said Jim, "except when the shifts change, you are to keep your people this side of the ditch," pointing to the line that separated the Mexican and American camps. "I have fifty men scouring the camp for whiskey. Anybody found with liquor will be arrested. If there is a particle of trouble over it in your camp, I'll let the Gringos loose. Sabez?"

Garces shivered a little. "Yes, señor," he said.

Jim took a turn up and down the street on his horse, then started for the dam site. As he cantered up the road, Billy Underwood, mounted on a moth-eaten pony, saluted with dignity.

"Boss, that saloon keeper up the canyon has got a billion bottles of booze. Worst whiskey you ever smelled. He says he's laying for you and if you cross his doorstep, he'll shoot you up."

Jim looked at Bill meditatively. "Bill, I'm going to call his bluff!"

"Us fellows in my posse'll shoot his place up if you say the word," cried Bill eagerly.

"No, that won't do," replied Jim. "But I have an idea that he's a four-flusher. Keep your eye on 'Mexico City,' Bill. I am afraid of trouble, though I've got Garces buffaloed so far."

Jim turned his horse and cantered back through Mexico City along the narrow river trail to Cactus Canyon. Just off the government reserve was a tent with a sheet iron roof. The trail to the tent was well worn. Jim dropped the reins over the pony's head and walked into the tent. There was a rough bar across one end, behind which stood a quiet-faced man with a black mustache. Drinking at the bar were two white men whom Jim recognized as foremen.

"You two fellows are fired," drawled Jim. "Turn in your time and leave camp this afternoon."

The Big Boss is king on a project. The two men meekly set down their glasses and filed out of the tent. It was something to have been fired by the big boss himself.

"And who are you?" asked the saloonkeeper.

"Don't you recognize me, Murphy?" asked Jim, pleasantly. "I have the advantage of you there. My name is Manning."

The saloonkeeper made a long-armed reach for a gun that stood in the corner.

"One moment, please," said Jim. As he spoke he jumped over the bar, bearing the saloonkeeper down with him before the long-armed reach encompassed the gun. Jim removed Murphy's knife, then picked up the gun himself.

Murphy started for the door with a jump. "Break nothing!" he yelled. "I'll have the law of New Mexico on you for this."

Murphy leaped directly into Bill Underwood's arms. "Hello, sweetie," said Bill, holding Murphy close. "Thought I'd come up and see how you was making it, Boss."

"Nicely, thanks," said Jim. "I'll be finished as soon as he breaks up his stock."

"It'll be some punishment for me to watch a job like that," said Bill, "but I'm with you, Boss."

He shifted his gun conspicuously as he released Murphy. Bill owed the saloonkeeper something over six weeks' pay. The occasion had an unholy joy for

him. Murphy looked Jim over, scratched his head and started to whistle nonchalantly. In ten minutes he had destroyed his stock in trade. When he had finished, he handed Jim the key of the tent with a profound bow.

"Now," said Jim, "drop a match on the floor."

When the flames were well caught Jim said, "See that he leaves camp, Bill." Then he mounted and rode away.

Murphy looked after him curiously. "Some man, ain't he?" he said to Bill.

"I'll eat out of his hand any time," replied Bill. "Get your pony, Murphy."

"I'll join your posse," suggested Murphy. "I bet I can ferret out more booze than any three of you."

"Nothing doing!" growled Bill. "Should think you would have better taste than to wanta do that."

Murphy shrugged his shoulders. "I want you to let me go up to that Greek fellow's place before I go," he said.

Bill stared but made no comment.

As Jim rode back through the lower town he stopped young Hartman, the government photographer.

"Hartman," he asked, "have the films for the movies come in yet?"

"Came in yesterday, Mr. Manning."

"Good work! Hartman, will you give us a show this evening?"

"The hall's in pretty rough shape but if you want it——"

"I want it to keep things quiet, Hartman, till we find those hombres and get them in jail at Cabillo."

The young fellow nodded. "I'll have things ready at seven. After the funeral, I'll get the word out."

Jim rode on to his neglected work at the office. There he found the members of the committee awaiting him. Even the chairman was eager to know details of occurrences since they had gone reluctantly to bed after midnight.

When Jim had finished his story, the Vermont man said pompously: "You seem to manage men rather well, Mr. Manning. In behalf of my colleagues I wish to thank you for your hospitality to us. As you know, we must leave this afternoon."

Jim nodded. "I shall have my superintendent take you over to the train. You will understand that I do not want to leave the camp myself."

"I wish we could stay and see the end of this," said one of the members. "It's like life in a dime novel."

"My chief regret is that we only had half of the Mask Ball. After this, when my constituents are tempted to give me a dinner, I shall urge a Mask Ball instead. Never had one given for me before and no débutante ever had anything on my feelings last night," said another.

"Henderson should have been a country squire," said Jim. "He's a perfect host."

The camp was quiet during the afternoon. Jim saw the committee off at five o'clock, then went up to the tent house. Sara and he glanced at each other coolly and nodded. Pen started the conversation hurriedly.

"What word from the two hombres?"

Jim shook his head. "One posse got away last night before I warned them. I'm afraid that if the murderers are brought into camp I can't avert a lynching bee."

Pen shivered. Sara grunted. "You'd think Pen had lived in a convent all of her life instead of a death pen like New York."

"It's so lonesome out here, human life means more to you," said Jim.

"Some philosopher you are," sneered Sara. "Fine lot of drool you got off at the hearing. Why didn't you keep to the main issue? The yokels are still saying with the rest of us, He must be dishonest or he'd give an honest 'No' to our accusations."

Jim answered slowly: "When a man says that sort of thing to me I usually knock him down, or completely ignore him."

"You can't knock us all down and the time is rapidly coming when we will be ignoring you, minus a job."

"Still," pleaded Pen, "he couldn't understand your speech. Once and for all, Jim, give him and all the rest the lie."

Jim ground his teeth and did not speak. Sara was obviously enjoying himself.

"You are mistaken, Pen. Jim and I have often discussed the divine origin of the New Englander. They are a pathetic lot of pifflers. They have no one to blame but themselves that they are going. Everywhere else the Anglo-Saxon has gone he has insisted that he had the divine right to rule and has kept it. Outsiders have had to conform or get out. But over here he promulgated the Equality idea. Isaac Gezinsky and Hans Hoffman and Pedro Patello are as fit to rule according to the Equality idea as anyone else. It didn't take much over two hundred years of this to crowd the New Englander out of the running. And who cares?"

"I do," said Jim, "because I believe in the things my race has stood for. Emerson says it's not chance but race that put and keeps the millions of India under the rule of a remote island in the north of Europe. Race is a thing to be reckoned with. Nations progress as their race dictates."

"Emerson!" jibed Sara. "Another inefficient highbrow!"

"I can't help believing," replied Jim doggedly, "that the world will lose in the submerging of the New England element in America."

"And yet right here, in your America," said Sara, "the leaders of the money trust are descendants of Puritans."

Jim winced. "'The strength of the pack is the wolf,' When we produced men of that type we should have recognized them and have controlled them. They are helping the pack down hill, all right. Be satisfied, Sara! Only you will not get me off this Project until it is finished."

"No?" sneered Sara.

Pen interrupted nervously: "A couple of men are coming up the trail."

Bill Underwood appeared at the tent door. Murphy was with him. "Boss," said Bill, "Murphy has got to see your Greek friend. I got him started south this noon, but he circled on me and I just picked him up on the mesa, headed this way. He wanted to come here on the quiet, but I brought him up in the open."

CHAPTER XX

THE DAY'S WORK

"Women know a loyalty that men scorn while they use it. This is the sex stamp of women."

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

With a quick glance at Sara, Jim rose. "Give Mr. Saradokis and his friend a chance to talk, of course, Bill. But shut Murphy up tonight and bring him round to me in the morning."

Bill essayed a salute that was so curiously like bringing his thumb to his nose that Pen had to turn a laugh into a cough and Jim smiled as he hurried out of the tent. As soon as the murder trouble was settled, Jim thought, he would have some sort of a settlement with Sara. His calm effrontery was becoming unbearable.

After a hurried supper Jim went back to the lower town to keep his eye on the moving picture show. As he mounted the steps of the little sheet iron building, a girlish figure hurried to meet him from the shadow of the ticket office.

"Pen!" cried Jim. "This is no place for you!"

"Oh, lots of women have gone in," protested Pen. "Please, Jim! Sara was so ugly this evening I just walked out and left him alone and I'm crazy to see what goes on down here."

Jim glanced in at the open door. The hall was nearly full. "If anything goes wrong, Penny, I would have my hands full and you might be hurt."

Pen gave a little shiver of anticipation. "Oh, please let me stay, Still! Just think how shut in I've been all these years."

Even though his common sense protested, Jim was an easy victim to Pen's pleading eyes and voice. He led the way into the hall. It was an enthusiastic crowd, that crunched peanuts and piñons and commented audibly on the pictures. Pictures of city life were the most popular.

"God! That's Fulton street, Brooklyn!" cried a man's voice as a street scene glided across the screen. "Wish I'd never left it."

"Gee! Look at the street car!" called another man. "I'd give a year of my life for a trolley ride."

"Look at them trees!" said someone as a view of a middle west farm followed. "Them are trees, boys, not cable way towers! How'd you like to shake the sand out of your eyes and see something green?"

"What are you peeved about?" exclaimed another voice. "Ain't you working for our great and glorious government that'll kick you out like a dead dog whenever it wants to? Look what it's doing to the Big Boss!"

"Hi! Man-o'-War at San Diego!" screamed a boy. "See all that wet water! Me for the navy! See how pretty that sailor looks in his cute white panties!"

Hartman held the crowd for a good two hours, then he called, "That's all, boys! Come again!"

"All? Nothing stirring," answered several voices. "Begin over again, Hartman. You can collect another nickel from us as we go out."

There was laughter and applause and not a soul offered to leave. In the darkness Hartman was heard to laugh in return and shortly the first film appeared again. Fields of corn shimmered in the wind. Cows grazed in quiet meadows. The audience stared again, breathlessly. Suddenly from without was heard a long-drawn cry. It was like the lingering shriek of a coyote. Few in the hall had heard the call before, yet no one mistook it for anything but human.

"An Apache yell!" exclaimed an excited voice.

There was a sudden overturning of benches and Pen and Jim were forced out into the street with the crowd.

An arc light glowed in front of the hall. Under this the crowd swayed for a moment, uncertain whither to move. Jim held Pen's arm and looked about quickly.

"I don't know where you will be safest, Pen. I wish I'd heeded the itching of my thumb and taken you home an hour ago."

"Jim," said Pen, "I certainly like your parties. They are full of surprises."

"You are a good little sport," said Jim, "but that doesn't make me less worried about you. Hang onto my arm now like a little burr."

He began to work his way through the crowd. "I don't want to attract their attention," he said. "They will follow me like sheep."

"Was it an Apache cry, Jim?" asked Pen.

"Yes! Old Suma-theek, with a bunch of his Indians has been riding the upper mesa for me tonight. Just to watch Mexico City. I told him to keep things quiet, so there must have been some imperative reason for the cry. I'll take you to the upper camp and get my horse."

Jim breathed a sigh of relief as they cleared the crowd and could quicken their pace. But they were scarcely out of the range of the arc light when a dark group ran hurriedly down from the mesa back of the town. It was old Suma-theek with four of his Indians. They held, tightly bound with belts and bandanas, two disheveled little hombres.

"Take 'em to jail, Boss?" panted Suma-theek. "I find 'em trying get back to lower town!"

"No! No! Back up into the mountains. I'll get horses to you and you must take them to Cabillo. Lord, I forgot to warn you!"

Suma-theek turned quickly but not quickly enough. A man ran up to the little group then plunged back toward the hall.

"A rope!" he yelled. "Bring a rope. They've got the two hombres."

Men seemed to spring up out of the ground.

"Run, Pen, toward the upper camp!" cried Jim.

"I won't!" exclaimed Pen. "They won't shoot while a woman is standing here."

She plunged away from Jim and caught Suma-theek's arm. The old Indian smiled and shoved her behind him. Jim turned and stood shoulder to shoulder with the Apache chief. "Now work back until we're against the power house with the hombres back of us," he said.

By the time the crowd was massed, yelling and gesticulating on three sides of it, the little group was backed up against the concrete wall of the little substation.

Jim waved his arm. "Go home, boys; go home! You can't do any lynching while the Apaches are here!"

"Give us the hombres, Boss!" shouted a threatening voice, "or we'll have to be rough on you."

"Send the lady home," called someone else. "This is no job for a lady to see."

"Boss," said Suma-theek in Jim's ear, "you send your squaw out. She go up mountain back of town, find Apache there, tell all Apaches bring guns, come here, help take hombres to jail."

Jim looked at Pen and his face whitened. But Pen's nostrils dilated and her eyes sparkled. Pen was Irish.

"I'll go," said Pen. "Where is Henderson?"

"He ought to be back," said Jim. "Try to find him after you get the Apaches. Send anybody down you can reach." Then he shouted to the crowd, "Let the lady out!"

Jim and Suma-theek stood well above most of the mob. Jim was unarmed and the crowd knew it. But even had any man there been inclined to prevent Pen's exit he would rather have done so under a cocked gun than under the look in Jim's white face as he watched Pen's progress through the crowd. The men gave back respectfully. As soon as she was free of the crowd, Pen broke into a run. She darted back behind the line of tents up onto the mountainside.

There for an instant she paused and looked back. The five Indians were as motionless as the crouching black heaps they guarded. They held their guns in the hollow of their arms, while Jim, with raised arm, was speaking. Pen sobbed in her excitement. If Uncle Denny could see his boy!

She turned and ran up the trail like a little rabbit. It seemed to her that she never would reach the top. The camp sounds were faint and far before she reached the upper mesa and saw dimly a figure on a horse. It was an Indian who covered her with a gun as she panted up to him.

"Suma-theek and the Big Boss say for you to call in all the other Indians and come help them at the little power house. The whites are trying to lynch the hombres."

The Indian peered down into her face and grunted as he recognized her. Then he suddenly stood in his stirrups and raised the fearful cry that had emptied the moving picture hall.

"Ke-theek! Ke-theek! Ke-theek! (To me! To me! To me!)"

Pen stood by the pony's head, trembling yet exultant. This, then, she thought was the life men knew. No wonder Jim loved his job!

Up on the mesa top, the night wind rushed against the encircling stars. The Indian chuckled.

"Mexicans, they no bother whites tonight. They know Apache call, it heap devil."

The sound of hoofs began to beat in about the waiting two. "You go," said the Indian. "Back along upper trail, it safe."

Pen started on a run toward the upper camp.

The surging crowd round Jim and the Indians heard the wild cry from the mesa top and the shouts and threats were stilled as if by magic. There was a moment of restless silence. That cry was a primordial thing, as well understood by every man in the mob as if he had heard it always. It was the cry of the hunted and the hunter. It was the night cry of forests. It was war with naked hands, death under lonely skies.

Jim called: "Some one is bound to get killed if you boys don't clear out. I'm not armed but a number of you are and the Indians are. If there are any of my Makon boys here, I want them to come over here and help me."

"Coming, Boss!" called a voice. "Only a few of the best of us here."

"You'll stay where you are," roared a big Irishman.

"Rush 'em, boys! Rush 'em! They don't dare to shoot!"

Old Suma-theek absent-mindedly sighted his gun in the direction of the last remark.

"Get a ladder! Get on top of the station. Altogether, boys!"

Fighting through the mob, half a dozen men suddenly ranged themselves with the Indians.

"Come into us!" one of them shrieked. "I ain't had a fight since I killed six Irishmen on the Makon and ate 'em for breakfast."

There was a swaying, a sudden closing of the crowd, when down from the mesa rushed old Suma-theek's bucks. They swept the mob aside like flying sand and closed about the little group against the wall. They were a very splendid picture in the arc light, these forty young bucks with their flying hair and plunging ponies. The moment must have been one of unmixed joy to them as the whites gave back, leaving them the street width.

Jack Henderson rushed up in Jim's automobile just as the street cleared. Jim hurried to the machine. "Jack, did you see Mrs. Saradokis?"

"Took her home in the machine. Had to argue with her to make her go. That's why I'm late. Just got back from delivering the committee."

The color came back under Jim's tan. "Get up to the wall there, Jack, with the machine and put the two hombres into the tonneau with two Indians and Suma-theek in front. The mounted Indians will act as your guard for a few miles out. Hit the high places to Cabillo. I guess you'd better keep the guard all the way. I wouldn't like you to meet a posse without one."

Jack nodded and began to work his way among the ponies. In a moment's time the touring car, with the cowering human bundles in the tonneau, had crossed the river. The crowd disappeared rather precipitately into the tents, no one courting conversation with Jim. He walked quietly up the road home.

Early the next morning, Billy Underwood brought Murphy up to Jim's house.

"Sorry my posse didn't get there in time to help you out, Boss," said Bill regretfully. "We didn't hear of it till it was all over."

Jim nodded. "Keep up your quarantine for a while, Bill. We won't risk booze for several days. Now, Murphy, who backed you in the saloon business?"

"Fleckenstein's crowd."

"How long have you known Mr. Saradokis?"

"Met him for the first time last night," replied the ex-saloonkeeper.

Jim eyed the man skeptically and Murphy spoke with sudden heat. "That's on the

level. I heard he was backing Fleckenstein and so I thought he'd help me get back at you. But he cursed me as I'll stand from no man because Underwood made a monkey of me by lugging me up there before you. No wonder his wife left the tent before he began, if that's his usual style. I'll get even with that dirty Greek."

Bill nodded. "Boss, that friend of yours has a vocabulary that'd turn a mule into a race horse."

"Murphy," said Jim, "you are Irish. My stepfather is an Irishman. He is the whitest gentleman that ever lived. It's hard for me to realize after knowing him that an Irishman can be doing the dirty work you are. But I suppose Ireland must breed men like you or Tammany would die."

Murphy hitched from one foot to the other. Jim went on in his quiet, slow way.

"I suppose you know pretty well what I'm up against on this Project. What would you do with Murphy if you were Manning?"

"I'd beat three pounds of dog meat off his face," replied Murphy, succinctly.

Jim shrugged his shoulders. "That would do neither of us any good. If I let you go, Murphy, will you give me your word of honor to let the Project absolutely alone?"

The Irishman gave Jim a quick look. "And would you take my word?"

"Not as a saloonkeeper, but as Irish, I would."

Murphy drew a long breath. "Thank you, Mr. Manning. I'll get off the Project if you say so. But I think you'd be wiser to give me a job below on the diversion dam where I can keep track of Fleckenstein and his crowd for you. I'll show you what it means to trust an Irishman, sir."

Jim suddenly flashed his wistful smile. "I knew you had the makings of a friend in you as soon as I saw how you took the cleaning up I gave you yesterday. I'll give you a note to my irrigation engineer. He needs a good man."

Bill and Murphy went out the door together. "I'll bet you the drinks, Bill," said Murphy, "that he never made you his friend."

"I ain't drinking. I'm his trusted officer," said Bill. "Get me? If you try any tricks on him——"

Bill stopped abruptly, for Murphy's fist was under his nose. "Did you hear him take my word like a gentleman?" he shouted. "I'd rather be dead than double cross him!"

"Aw, go on down to the diversion dam," said Bill, irritably. "I've got no time to listen to your talk. You heard him tell me to guard the place!"

A part of Jim's day's work, after his letters were answered and written in the morning, was to tramp over every portion of the job. The quarry, in the mountain to the north of the dam whence were being taken the giant rock for embedding in the concrete was his first care. The stone must be of the right quality and of proper weight and contour to bind well with the cement. The quarrying itself must be going forward rapidly and without waste. Then came the giant sand dump, where the dinkies had filled a canyon with the sand from the river bed. This was the supply that fed the always hungry mixer. After this the warehouse and the power house, the laboratories and the concrete mixer, the cableway towers and the superintendent's office, with all the thousand and one details, expected and unexpected, that made or marred the success of the dam, must be looked over. The last visit was always at the dam itself, where Jim spent most of the day.

On the afternoon after Jim had hired Murphy he stood on the section of the dam which now showed no signs of old Jezebel's strenuous visit. Jim was watching the job with his outer mind, while with his inner mind he turned over and over the things that Pen had said to him the night before the mask ball. Even in the excitement that followed the ball, Pen's scolding, as he called it, had never been entirely out of his thoughts. In spite of their sting, Jim realized that Pen's words had cleared his vision, had given him a sense of content that was comparable only to the feeling he had had on the night so many years ago that he had discovered his profession.

To find that the cause of his failure lay in himself and not in intangible forces without that he could not combat was strangely enough a very real relief. For Jim was taking Pen's review of his weaknesses as essential truth!

Suddenly, with his eyes fastened critically on a great stone block that was being carefully bedded on the section, he laughed aloud and whispered to himself:

"I feel just the way I used to when I got mad because I couldn't get compound interest and Dad straightened me out, giving me a good calling down as he did so. Pen! Pen! My dearest!"

Oscar Ames, picking his way carefully among the derricks and stone blocks, grunted when he saw the smile on Jim's face. Jim did not cease to smile when he saw Oscar.

"Come up here, Ames! I want your advice!"

Oscar grunted again, but this time as if someone had knocked his breath out of him. He paused, then came on up to where Jim was standing. Men were busy preparing the surface on which they stood for the next pouring. In the excavation below, the channeling machine was gouging out a trench for the heel of the dam. Pumps were working steadily, drawing seepage water from the excavation. Men swarmed everywhere, on derricks, on engines, with guide ropes for cableway loads, scouring and chipping rock and concrete surfaces, ramming and bolting forms into place, shifting motors, always hurrying yet always giving a sense of direction and purpose.

"She's coming along, Oscar," said Jim.

Oscar nodded. Something in Jim's tone made his own less pugnacious than usual as he said:

"What you using sand-cement for instead of the real stuff?"

"It's stronger," said Jim. "A very remarkable thing! We've been testing that out five or six years."

Jim's tone was very amiable. Oscar looked at him suspiciously and Jim laughed. "Thought we were working some kind of a cement graft?" Jim asked.

"Well, that's the common report!"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Oscar!" exclaimed Jim disgustedly.

"Well, now," said Ames doggedly, "just why should sand-cement be stronger than the pure Portland?"

Jim scowled, started to speak with his old impatience, then changed his mind.

"You come up to the laboratory with me, Oscar. I'll give you a lesson on cement that will put a stop to this gossip at once. A man of your experience ought to know better."

Conflicting emotions showed in Oscar's face, boyish despite his fifty years. This

was the first time Jim had used the man to man tone with Ames. He cleared his throat and followed the Big Boss up the trail to the little adobe laboratory. The young cement engineer looked curiously at Jim's companion.

"Mr. Field," said Jim, "this is Mr. Ames. He is one of the most influential men in the valley. He is giving practically all of his time to watching our work up here. He tells me the farmers feel that sand-cement isn't good. We will put in an hour showing Mr. Ames our tests and their results for the last five years, both here and on the Makon."

Field did not show his surprise at Jim's about-face. But he did say to himself as he went into the back room for his old reports, "Evidently the farmer is no longer to be told to go to Hades when he kicks. I wonder what's happened."

An hour later Jim and Oscar walked slowly up the trail toward Jim's house. Jim had invited Ames up for a further talk. Oscar had shown a remarkable aptitude for the details that Jim and Field had explained. And his pleasure at finally understanding the whole idea upon which Jim was basing his concrete work was such that Jim felt a very real remorse. He recalled almost daily questions from Oscar and other farmers that he had answered with a shortness that was often contemptuous.

"Now you see," Oscar said as they entered the cottage, "we'll actually save money on that. Wonderful thing, Mr. Manning, how mixing the sand and cement intimately enough, as you say, turns the trick. I'll tell the bunch down at Cabillo about that tomorrow."

Jim shoved a box of cigars at Oscar and surveyed him with his wistful smile. There were dark circles round Jim's eyes that in his childhood had told of nerve strain. Jim at that moment wondered what Iron Skull would have made of the present situation. He was silent so long that Oscar spoke a little impatiently:

"If you ain't going to talk, Mr. Manning, Jane is waiting for me and I got to see Mr. Sardox yet."

Jim pulled himself together, and, a little diffidently, handed Ames the Secretary's letter with the copy of his own.

"Tell me what you think of these," said Jim.

Oscar read the two letters carefully, then said: "I'd think more of 'em if I had any idea what either of you was driving at."

"It means just this," said Jim, "that unless the engineers and the farmers work together, the Reclamation Service will get what the water power trust is trying to give it, and that is, oblivion."

"Aha," said Oscar, "that's why you've been so decent to me today?"

"Yes," replied Jim simply.

Oscar's look of suspicion returned. Jim went on slowly and carefully. "It will be bad business if the Service fails. It will retard the government control of water power greatly, and there is enough possible water power in this country, Oscar, to turn every wheel in it and to heat and light every home in the land. If the Service fails it will show just one thing; that the farmers and engineers on the Projects are too selfish to get together for the country's good, that the farmer is a stupid cat's paw for the money interests and the engineer a spineless fool who won't fight."

"Look here, Manning," cried Oscar, "don't you think I'm justified in thinking about nothing but my own ranch, considering what it's cost me?"

"Don't you think," Jim returned, "that I'm justified in thinking about nothing but my dam and in letting the water power trust eat it and you up, considering how hard I work on the building itself?"

Oscar stared and chewed his cigar and Jim smoked in silence for a moment.

"Ames," he said finally, "I wonder if you will get this idea as quickly as you did the sand-cement one. America isn't like England or Germany or France. Over there the citizens of each country are practically of one race. Fundamentally, they think about the same way and want the same things. If one man or many neglect public duties it makes no permanent difference. Someone else will take up the duty some time, and in just about the same way that the negligent man would have done. But in America we have become a hodge-podge of every race. We have no national ideals. You can't tell me now of a single national ideal you and I are working for or even thinking about. You can't tell me what an American is, or I you. Get me?"

Oscar nodded, his tanned face keen with interest.

"Now the time has come when if you or I want any particular one of the old New England ideals to live in this country we have got to fight for it, start an educational campaign for it. If we don't, the Russian Jews or the Italians or the

Syrians will change things to suit their own ideals. Now they may be all right. Their ideals may be as good as mine. They have every right to be here and to rule if they can. But I don't like the kind of government they stood for in their native countries.

"I'm a pig-headed Anglo-Saxon, full of an egotism that dies hard. I believe that the Reclamation Service idea is an outgrowth of the fine democracy that our fathers brought to New England. I believe that the folks that are going to inherit America can't afford to lose the idea of the Service and I'm going to fight for it now till they get me. Am I clear?"

"Sure," said Oscar. "Ain't I of Puritan stock myself?"

"That's why I'm talking to you," said Jim. "Now I take the central idea of the United States Reclamation Service to be this. It is a return to the old principle of the people governing themselves directly, of their assuming individual responsibility for the details and cost of governing. It is the fine outgrowth of the industrial lessons we have learned in the past years, combined with the town meeting idea, brought up to date.

"One central organization can do work better and cheaper, if it will, than a dozen competing interests. If the central organization is privately owned it demands a heavy profit. But if it is owned by the government it takes no profit. On a Project, free individuals voluntarily combine to do business and to directly administer the products of that business to themselves. The Service is merely the tool of the people on the Projects.

"Oscar, it's up to you and me. In antagonizing you farmers, I've opened the way for the enemies of the Service to reach you. And you, in being reached, are endangering the Service. Is it true that you are going to help Saradokis and Fleckenstein get your honest debts repudiated?"

The two men sat and stared at each other, Oscar with his years of unutterable labor behind him, his traditions that dealt with a constant hand-to-hand struggle with nature for his own existence; Jim with his long years of dreaming behind him and his awakening vision of social responsibility before him. Engineer and desert farmer, they were of widely differing characteristics, yet they had one fundamental quality in common. They both were producers. They were not little men. There was nothing parasitic in their outlook. They had always dealt with fundamental, primitive forces.

Suddenly Oscar leaned forward. "Are you trying to string me into saying the increased cost of the dam is all right?"

Jim tapped on the table. "Not five per cent of the increased cost but comes from the improvements you farmers have asked for. And not one cent of the cost of the entire Project but will be paid for by the water power produced and sold. You know that, Ames. Now pay attention."

Jim shook his finger in Oscar's face and said slowly and incisively:

"You farmers will never repudiate your honorable debts while I can fight. You are going to fight with me, Ames, to help me save the Service. You are going to put your shoulder to mine and fight as you did when the old dam was going out under your feet! Do you get that?"

Oscar opened his mouth but no words came. Then both men jumped to their feet as Mrs. Ames' gentle voice said from the kitchen door:

"Oscar will fight, or I'll leave him."

CHAPTER XXI

JIM GETS A BLOW

"The eagle has lived long in my side. He is cruel with talons built for seizing. Is this why so many nations choose him as their emblem?"

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

Jane never had looked meeker or smaller or more desert worn than she did as she stood eying the two men; that is, meek except as to her eyes. These burned like sapphires in the sun. In them was concentrated the deathless energy that Penelope had found was Jane's chief characteristic.

"I've been sitting in the kitchen waiting for Mrs. Flynn and listening to you two talk. It was very interesting."

"Jane, you keep quiet," said Oscar.

"Come in and sit down, Mrs. Ames," said Jim, pulling forward a chair.

"Don't be too polite to me, Mr. Manning," said Jane. "I ain't used to it and it makes me nervous. I made up my mind while I heard you talk I'd get a few things off my chest. It may help both of you. I've often said, when Oscar was always telling me to keep quiet, that when I had something to say I'd say it."

Oscar looked very much mortified. "Jane," he said, "what's got into you?"

"Well, it isn't your politeness, that's sure. Funny now, that Mrs. Penelope and I both have nice manners while her husband and mine are both pigs as far as their ways to us go. There isn't a more popular man in the country than Oscar, but he keeps his popular ways all outside his own home."

Oscar and Jim looked at each other and waited. They both realized that the eruption was inevitable.

"Women are awful fools. Until I had running water put in against Oscar's wishes I lugged as many as thirty buckets of water a day for thirty years. I've carried water and I've chopped wood and I've had babies and I've come at your bidding, Oscar, but now, I'm going to complain. And it's not about my life either.

"I used to feel sorry for myself until I got to know Mrs. Pen. She has *real* trouble, but instead of getting peevish as I have over just Oscar's selfishness, she's let it make her see the world instead of herself. She has a sort of calm outlook on life. She has told me a dozen times that she looks at life as a great game and trouble as one of the hazards. That's golf talk. She says the only real

sport to be got out of the game is to play it according to rule. And she says marriage seems to be one of the rules. Think of having the courage to talk that way about marriage! She's better than a book."

Mrs. Ames chuckled reminiscently. Then stared out at the desert and her lips moved in silence as if she found it hard to frame her next sentence.

"We've talked a lot about the Project, she and I. At first I was like Oscar, all for being afraid our ranch wasn't going to get as much and a little more than anyone else's. Then after she kept talking about it, all of a sudden I saw that I wasn't Jane Ames at all, drudging out my life in the sand. I'm a human being, struggling along with other human beings to make a living and *be happy*. And then I got the feeling that I wanted to help to make this whole Project the finest place on earth not only for myself but for everyone else.

"And then, just as I get started on something that's giving me my first chance since I was married to mix with people and do some real big work in the world, I find out that Oscar is getting all mixed up in deals that'll ruin Mr. Manning and the whole Project as far as our owning it goes."

"Jane!" shouted Oscar.

"Yes, Jane!" replied Mrs. Ames. "If you think I'm going to stand that kind of disgrace, if you think I'm going to keep quiet while my babies' father is a cat's paw for fellows like that Greek and Freet, you are mistaken. And I'm not going to shilly-shally about it. Oscar, you are going to begin right now fighting with Mr. Manning for the Project or I'll leave you."

Oscar jumped to his feet. "For the Lord's sake, Jane, don't talk that way! How did I know how you felt? You never talk to me.". Ames forgot Jim. He laid a knotted hand on Jane's shoulder. "Why, Jane, I've often thought if anything happened to you, I'd kill myself. I didn't have time to run in and tell you that every fifteen minutes. But I'll do it, now, by heck, if you want me to! You don't understand about me and Mr. Sardox, though."

Jane's burning eyes did not leave Oscar's face. "Oscar, you choose right now between the Freet crowd, and Mr. Manning and me."

There was that in Jane's eyes which caused Oscar to pale under his tan. "All right, Jane! All right! When you put it that way there is just one thing for me to do. I'll quit them."

Jane suddenly turned, and bowing her head against Oscar's arm she began to sob. "It would have torn my heart strings out to have left you, Oscar."

Jim watched the two with eyes that saw none too clearly.

Oscar smoothed Jane's hair and shook his head. "No use to tell a woman a secret. Jane, you went and told Mrs. Penelope about Freet, didn't you?"

Mrs. Ames wiped her eyes. "You told her yourself. You talked to the wrong flower girl at the ball. She came to me about it the first thing when she saw me today."

"Shucks!" said Oscar.

"How did you get in touch with Freet, Oscar?" asked Jim.

"Aw, I'll help you, Mr. Manning, but I won't tell you other people's business."

"All right, Oscar. It may interest you to know that I had received a note this morning from Freet saying he was coming down here to see me on business."

Oscar flushed. "Come on, Jane, let's be going. I'm much obliged to you for the cement talk. Why didn't you help me that way before, Mr. Manning?"

Jim laughed. "I didn't know enough to, Oscar. To tell the truth, a lady has been after me, too!"

"Mrs. Pen!" exclaimed Jane.

Jim nodded comically and Oscar with a sudden roar of laughter shook hands with Jim. "And women think they need the vote!" he said, leading Jane out the door.

That evening just as Jim was finishing his supper Pen walked into the living room. "Jim," she said, "did you know that Mr. Freet was coming?"

Jim pulled out a chair for Pen but she shook her head. "Yes, I had a letter from him. He wants to see my sand-cement work and one or two other new stunts I'm trying out."

Pen moistened her lips. "Jim, he's up at our tent now, talking with Sara. They say nothing before me, but—Still, I'm going to take Sara back to New York at once."

"We'll see what I can do first," said Jim. "I'll go up there now." He picked up his

hat, then paused. "Pen, I haven't told you how much your talk the other night has done for me, or how—how I thank you for staying on here to help me after—after Wind Ridge. It is—I——"

"Jane told me about your talk with Oscar this afternoon. O Still, I'm so proud and so glad!"

Jim looked at Pen's glowing cheeks and at her parted scarlet lips. "Pen," he said suddenly, "I'm going to have Henderson give more mask balls. You are years younger since having a good dance, and it looks as if a dance will be the only chance I'll ever have to hug you for all the dear things you do for me!"

Then he fled out the door before Pen could answer. He walked in at the open door of the tent.

"Good evening, Mr. Freet," he said.

Arthur Freet rose nonchalantly. "Hello, Manning! Pleasure before duty. I had to get Saradokis' report on my New York deals before I came to see you."

"Oh, come across, Mr. Freet!" said Jim quietly. "I know about what you want and you'll have to approach me sooner or later, so let's get done with it."

Freet smiled broadly. "I always knew you'd come to your senses, Manning, if we gave you time. Well, our friend Saradokis is in touch with the New York office of the Transcontinental Water Power Company. They have a very tempting proposition to make to the farmers. They stand ready to outbid any competitor for the power you will develop on the Project."

"We'll let 'em bid, sure," replied Jim calmly. "I shall advertise for bids as soon as I am ready."

"That won't do," said Freet. "The only way to get away with this is to do it quietly. Hold the public off till the contract is signed."

Jim grunted. Sara eyed him without comment. Oscar spoke suddenly. "Now look here, Mr. Manning, I ain't as sore at you as I was. I guess, after our talk this afternoon, you think you're doing what's best for the valley. But you want to be fair about this. It may not look quite right, but it's the best thing for the farmers. We want to get all the money we can out of the power. You say yourself that's what will pay for the dam. And if these folks will give us twice what anyone else will, I say close the deal with them, any way you can."

"What's *your* price, Ames?" asked Jim clearly.

Oscar jumped to his feet. "In the old days," he roared, "no man would have lived to ask me that twice!"

Jim looked for a long moment into Oscar's eyes, then he drawled: "All right, Oscar, I apologize. Only you'd better leave national politics to your inferiors after this. What's *your* price, Mr. Freet?"

Arthur Freet laughed. "You can't get a rise out of me, Jim! My price is to see these Projects a financial success. Methods don't bother me, nor hard names."

Jim sat silent for a moment, then he turned suddenly on Sara. "Of course, you get a chunk of money, Sara. But there is something more in it than that for you. What are you trying to ruin me for, Sara?"

Again Sara seemed to see scarlet. "Didn't you spoil Pen's——"

"Keep that name out of this!" shouted Jim.

"Then don't ask me again why I hate you," returned Sara. "I told you once. But you are too superior, too one-sided, too egotistical, to see anyone but yourself!" He rose on one elbow.

"You were the closest friend I ever had and you turned me down without a chance to make myself right. You never sent me word in my living death. Do you suppose I enjoy this mental hell I live in? Did you ever dream you were nailed fast in your coffin? That's my life waking and sleeping. Why shouldn't I curse a God who could serve me such a trick? I would make every living thing a cripple, if I could, and I'd begin on you, you! I'll get you yet!"

Jim glanced at Oscar. The big desert farmer was staring at Sara, horror in every line of his face.

"Oh, come!" said Freet, "I didn't know you had anything personal in this, Mr. Saradokis. Manning and I are engineers, out for the good of the Projects."

"Whatever your motives are, Mr. Freet," said Jim, "I don't like your methods and haven't since the Makon days. The water power will be opened to public bids and if you try to force me I'll tell what I guess."

Freet laughed. "Don't be too sure of yourself, Jim! You are branded as my pupil. If I go, you will probably go."

"O hell!" said Jim, starting for the door. "I'd rather go if I've got to spend my life fighting fellows like you. In this instance, though, I'm boss. I have the sale of the water power in my control."

"Don't be too sure, Jim," said Freet, still smiling.

Oscar followed Jim from the tent. Neither of them spoke while on the way to Jim's house where Pen and Jane were sitting with Mrs. Flynn. But in the kitchen Oscar made Jim wait while he told the three women what had occurred in the tent house.

"Now all of you witness," he said, "that I'm through with that bunch. They played me for a sucker to influence the farmers against Mr. Manning and for the trust. When I think of the many different kinds of a fool I am I wish some good trained mule would come along and kick me."

"That's all right, Oscar," said Jim, "you've been no bigger fool than I have. We'll get busy now, won't we?"

Oscar flushed as Jim smiled at him. "Darn it, Mr. Manning," he said, "why haven't you looked at me that way before?" Then he laughed with the others.

Then Pen spoke very uncertainly: "This settles it, of course. I shall go back to New York at once with Sara."

The little group in the kitchen looked at Jim. His face was white and set.

"Wait a day or so, Pen. I must get some sort of a plan formulated."

"What am I to do with that man Freet hanging round?" asked Pen.

"Come down for a day or so with me, Mrs. Pen," said Mrs. Ames.

"That's a good idea," said Jim. "Freet won't stay after tomorrow, anyway. I can promise you that."

"And I'll look out for the caged hyena," said Mrs. Flynn. "If God lets me live to spare my life, he'll get a tongue lashing from me that'll give him new respect for the Irish."

Once more the group in the kitchen laughed, though tensely, and parted for the night.

The next day Freet put in on the dam with Jim. Jim treated him with courtesy,

showing him everything that he asked to see. Freet was very complimentary and told Jim he was a credit to his teacher. After a visit to the quarry Jim said suggestively:

"You will want to take the six o'clock train, tonight, of course."

Freet hesitated. Jim went on dryly. "Under the circumstances, it is hardly in good taste for you to remain. It might look as if you and I were having a gentleman's agreement on the price of dams."

Freet laughed. "I had planned to take the six o'clock train. I quite finished my business with Saradokis last night. He's a brilliant business man. Too bad he has that silly whim about you."

Jim did not answer. He called to Henderson and asked him to have the automobile sent to the quarter house. He himself took Freet to the train. They talked construction work all the way and parted amiably. Then Jim returned to his belated office work.

The last letter that he opened was from the Director of the Service. It explained to Jim that while the Director had complete faith in Jim's engineering ability and integrity, Jim's unpopularity not only with the public but with the investigating committee made his resignation seem expedient for the good of the Service. It was with extreme regret and with full appreciation of what Jim had done for the Service that the Director asked for Jim's resignation, three months from date.

Jim folded the letter and put it in his pocket. Then he stared out of the door at the Elephant. The great beast was silent in the after-glow. A to-hee cheeped sleepily in a nearby cholla:

> "O yahee! O yahai!
> Sweet as arrow weed in spring!"

Then Jim went slowly up the trail to his house, and, refusing his supper, went into his room and closed the door.

CHAPTER XXII

JIM PLANS A LAST FIGHT

"The coyotes are going leaving behind them bleaching bones. The Indians are going leaving a few arrow heads and water vessels. What will the whites leave?"

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

Jim was angry. All night he lay staring into the dark with his wrath accumulating until it finally focused itself, not on the Director or on Sara or on the farmers, but on himself! He reviewed the years mercilessly. He saw how he had refused again and again to shoulder the responsibilities that belonged to him—belonged, because of his fitness to carry them. Charlie Tuck and Iron Skull both had done what they could to make him see, but wrapped in his futile dreams he had refused to look, and, he told himself, long before he had left Exham, his father had tried to set him on the right path but he always had put off the quest on which his father had sent him, always thrust it over into tomorrow when today was waiting for his start.

The very peak of his anger was reached when it suddenly came home to Jim that he had failed his father, had proved renegade to old Exham.

Three months! A cool dismissal after over eight years of his heart's blood had been given to the Service! Jim groaned, then sat erect.

"Serves you right, you dreaming fool! Nobody to blame but yourself! Three months! And in that time the farmers will elect Fleckenstein to Congress and the open fight for repudiation will be on!"

Jim groaned again. Then abruptly he jumped out of bed, turned on the light, and looked at the little picture of Pen on the wall.

"Pen," he said, "Fleckenstein shan't be elected! I'm going out of this Project, fighting like a hound. I've been a quitter all my life, I'll admit, but I'm going to put up my fists at the end. I'll rush the work here and I'll keep Fleckenstein out of Congress. I'll spend no time belly-aching but I'll stand up to this like a man. Honestly, I will, Penelope."

Dawn was coming in at the window. Jim filled the bathtub and took a cold plunge. The sun was just rimming the mountains when he began to tune up his automobile. He filled the tank with gasoline and cranked the engine and was starting out the door when old Suma-theek appeared. Jim stopped.

"Where you go, Boss?" asked the Indian.

A sudden desire to talk to Iron Skull's old friend made Jim say, "Get in and ride to the bridge with me, Suma-theek."

The chief clambered into the seat by Jim. "Suma-theek, the Big Boss at Washington has given me three months before I must leave the dam."

"Why?" asked Suma-theek.

"Because I darn well deserve it. I've got everybody here sore at me. Everybody on this Project hates me, so he's afraid it will hurt all the dams the Big Sheriff at Washington wants to build for all the whites."

"He's a heap fool, that Big Boss at Washington. All the people that know you love you in their hearts. It hurt your heart because you have leave dam?"

Jim nodded. The old Indian eyed him keenly. Then his lean, bronze face turned sad. "Why you suppose Great Spirit no care how much heart aches? Why you suppose he let that little To-hee bird all time sing love to you, then no let you have your love? Maybe, Boss Still, all those things you believe, all those things you work for, Great Spirit think no use. Huh?"

"The Great Spirit didn't explain anything to us, Suma-theek, but he gave us our dreams. I want to fix my tribe's dream so firmly it can never be forgotten. As for my own little dream of love, what does it matter?"

Suma-theek responded to Jim's wistful smile with an old man's smile of lost illusions. "Dreams are always before or behind. They are never here. You are young. Yours are before. Suma-theek is old. His are behind. Boss Still, you no sabez one thing. All great dreams of any tribe they built by man for love of woman."

Jim stared for a moment at the purple shadow of the Elephant. Then he stopped the machine at the bridge to let Suma-theek out. In a moment the machine was climbing the mesa on the road to Cabillo.

Jim always thrilled to his first view of Cabillo as he swung down into the valley. It is a little town lying on a desert plain three thousand feet above the sea. Flood or drought or utter loneliness had not prevailed to keep men from settling there. It is set in the vivid green of alfalfa field, of vineyards, and of orchards. Around about the town, the desert lies, rich, yellow, and to the east rise mountains that stand like deep purple organ pipes against the blue desert sky. It seemed to Jim this morning that the pipes had forever murmured with the wordless brooding music of the desert winds. That age after age they had been uttering vast harmonies too deep for human ears to hear, uttering them to countless generations of men who had come and gone like the desert sand.

In Cabillo Jim went, after a hasty breakfast, to see John Haskins. Haskins was a banker and a Harvard man who had come to Cabillo thirty years before with bad lungs. He was, Jim thought, an impartial, though keen, observer of events in the valley. He was in the banker's office but a few minutes.

"Mr. Haskins," he said, "do you consider fifty dollars an acre too heavy a debt for the farmers to carry on their farms?"

"Not for the experienced irrigation farmer," replied Haskins.

Jim paused thoughtfully. "Experienced! And not twenty per cent. of them will be experienced." He made an entry in his notebook, then asked, "Is ten years too short a time to give the farmers to pay for the dam?"

"Not with wise cropping."

"Is it possible to find sufficient water power market to practically pay for the dam, without reference to the crops?" Jim went on.

"Yes," answered Haskins.

"If a group of farmers and business men will assume a debt, voluntarily, then repudiate it, are they sufficiently responsible persons to assume for all time the handling of the irrigation system and water power the government is developing for them?" Jim's voice was slow and biting.

Haskins answered clearly, "No!"

Jim's last question made Haskins smile. "Is this an intelligent group of men, these farmers and business men?"

"Unusually so, especially the men who have been long in the desert and have struggled with its vicissitudes. Some of the Mexican farmers are difficult to handle, though, because they don't understand what the government is trying to do. For heaven's sake, Manning, why this catechism?"

Jim laughed. "Oh, I want your opinion to quote. I'm about to put up a fight against Fleckenstein."

"But that will be hardly proper, will it, considering your job? Not but what I think Fleckenstein ought to be fought!"

"Oh, I'm not going on the stump. I'm merely going to fight him by attending to certain portions of my job that I've always neglected."

Jim rose and Haskins shook his head ruefully. "More power to your elbow, old man. But nothing can beat Fleckenstein now, I'm afraid."

"I'm going to mighty well try it," said Jim as he hurried out the door.

His next visit was along the irrigation canal to a point where his irrigation engineer was watching the work on a small power station.

"Hello, Marlow, how is Murphy doing?"

Marlow laughed. "I made him timekeeper. He's assumed the duties of policeman, ward boss and of advertising agent for you."

"Where is he?" asked Jim.

"Coming right along the road there now."

Jim started the machine on to meet the stocky figure that Marlow pointed out.

Murphy grinned broadly as Jim invited him into the machine. "I want to talk to you, Murphy? How does the job go?"

"Aw, it's no job! It's a joy ride. I thought I knew every farmer in the county but I didn't. A new one turns up every day to tell the Little Boss how to irrigate."

"Murphy," said Jim, "how do you size up Fleckenstein?"

Murphy looked at Jim curiously. "Just like everyone else does, as a crook."

"How much pull has he with the farmers?"

Murphy shrugged his shoulders. "How much pull would the devil himself have if he promised repudiation? Tell me that, Boss!"

"Is the chap who is running against him any good?"

"Who, Ives? Is a bag of jelly an implement of war? What have you got on your mind, Boss?"

"Well, to tell the truth, Murphy, I've just come to! The election is just three months off, isn't it? I am going to try to lick Fleckenstein in that time."

"Can't be done, Boss, unless you'll take the stump yourself."

"Of course, that's out of the question," replied Jim. "But this is what I'm going to do. I'm going to see every farmer in the valley and have a good talk with him. I'm going to make him see this Project as I do. And I'm going to send for half a dozen of the best men in the Department of Agriculture to come out here and get the newcomers interested in scientific farming. I'm not going to mention Fleckenstein's name."

Murphy looked at Jim, then out at the irrigating ditch along which the machine was moving slowly. "Boss," he said, "go ahead if it'll ease you up any, but you might as well try to fight a hydrophobia skunk with a perfume atomizer as to try them high-brow methods on Fleckenstein."

Jim laughed. "Well, do you know of a better method, Murphy?"

"Yes, the good, old-fashioned way of putting up more whisky, more money and more free rides than the other fellow does."

Jim turned the machine back toward the power station. "Of course, you know that that is out of the question, Murphy."

"Well, what do you want me to do, Boss?" asked Murphy.

"Tomorrow is Sunday," said Jim. "I want you to come up to my house and discuss with me the characteristics of every man in the valley. I don't know anyone better qualified to know them."

"I'll be there," said Murphy, climbing from the machine. He watched Jim drive away. "There's something about him that gets under my skin," said the ex-saloonkeeper. "I'll be holding his hand, next. Poor snoozer! Think of him trying to fight mud like Fleckenstein. But I'll back him if it'll relieve his mind any."

Jim was back at the dam by mid-afternoon. He found Pen with Mrs. Flynn in the shining little kitchen of his adobe.

"Penelope," he said, "is there any way we can rob Sara of his poison fangs? Certainly sending him away will do little good. I have been thinking of giving him his choice of being under espionage or of being turned over to the government. I've played with him, Pen, a little too long. Now that it's too late, I'm going to lock the door."

Mrs. Flynn looked frightened. She never had seen this expression on Jim's face before. The scowl between his eyes was deep, his jaw was tense and his eyes were too large and too bright. But Pen's face flushed eagerly.

"You are angry at last, Jimmy! Thank heaven for that! We can watch Sara, easily, if you will use your authority. And oh, I do so want to stay and help! Your temper is touched at last, Jim. I am thankful to Freet for that."

Jim nodded grimly. "Will you go over to the tent with me? Or had I better have it out with Sara alone?"

"Neither," said Pen. "I'll settle him myself. I feel like having a scrap with someone. What else are you going to do, Still? Shall you report Freet?"

"That's out of the question. Freet is the least of my troubles, anyhow. I'll tell you all my plans." He looked from Mrs. Flynn, whose anxious eyes did not leave his face, to Pen, with her cheeks showing the scarlet of excitement. Something in their tense interest in him was suddenly very comforting to Jim and he smiled at them. And though it was a little strained it was the old flashing, sweet smile that those who knew him loved.

"I don't know how I'm to get through the next few weeks," he said, "unless you two are very kind and polite to me."

Mrs. Flynn suddenly threw her apron over her head. "God knows," she sobbed, "I've waited for you to smile this weary time! I've washed and mended all your clothes and cleaned your room and cooked everything I ever heard of and not a smile could I get. I thought you had something incurable!"

Jim made a long stride across the room and hugged Mrs. Flynn, boyishly. "Didn't you tell me you felt like my mother? Don't you know mothers have to see through their boy's stupidity and selfishness down to the real trouble that lies underneath? No one will do it but a mother!"

Mrs. Flynn wiped her eyes on her apron. "God knows I'm an old fool," she said. "Change that dirty khaki suit so's I can wash it."

Jim chuckled and turned to Pen. She was watching the little tableau with all her hungry heart in her eyes.

"Pen! Oh, my dearest!" breathed Jim. Then he paused with a glance at his near-mother, who immediately began to rattle the stove lids.

"Get out and take a walk, the two of you. God knows I'm a good Catholic, but there's some things—get out, the two of you! Let your nerves ease up a bit. Sure we all pound and twang like a wet tent in the wind."

Out on the trail Jim spoke a little breathlessly: "Pen! If you would just let me put my head down on your shoulder, if you'd put your dear cheek on mine and smooth my hair, the heaven of it would carry me through the next few weeks. Just that much, Pen, is all I'd ask for!"

Tears were in Pen's eyes as she looked up into the fine, pleading face. "Jim, I can't!"

"You wouldn't be taking it from Sara."

"Sara! Poor Sara! He wants no embraces from anyone! I'm no more married to Sara than a nurse to her patient. But I mean that as long as things are as they are, the honest thing, the safe thing, is for me not to—to—Oh, Jim, it's not square to any of us. We must keep on the straight, clear basis of friendship!"

But Jim had seen Pen's heart in her eyes and the call of it was almost more than his lonely heart could bear.

"Great heavens, Pen!" he cried. "Life is so short! We need each other so! What does it profit us or the world that all your wealth of tenderness should go untouched and all my hunger for it unsatisfied? If your touch on my hair will brace me for the fight of my life, why should you deny it to me?"

Pen tried to laugh. "Still, what's happened to your morals?"

Jim replied indignantly: "You can't apply a system of ethics to your cheek against mine except to say it's all wrong that I can't have you now, in my great need. And I warn you, Pen, I shall come to you thirsty until at last you give me what is mine. Only your cheek to mine is all I ask for, Penny."

Pen looked up at the pleading beauty of Jim's eyes. "Don't plead with me, Jim," she half whispered, "or I think my heart will break."

The two looked away from each other to the Elephant. The great beast seemed to sleep in the afternoon sun.

"Tell me about your plans, Still," said Pen, her voice not altogether steady.

"Murphy thinks I'm a fool," said Jim. "Perhaps I am. But Oscar Ames has been a good deal of a surprise to me: Just as soon as I took the trouble to explain the concrete matter to him, he got it instantly. And in a way he got my talk about the new social obligations you showed me."

Pen interrupted eagerly: "You don't know how much you did in that talk, Jim. Oscar has discovered you and he's as proud as Columbus. He has made me tell him everything I know about you. You see you have that rare capacity for making anyone you will take the trouble to talk to feel as if he was your only friend and confidant. Oscar has discovered that you are misunderstood, that he is the only person that really understands you and he's out now explaining to his neighbors how little they really know about concrete."

Jim looked surprised. "I don't know what I did, except to follow your instructions, but if it worked on Ames, it ought to work on the rest. I believe that after a few more talks with Ames, he will work against Fleckenstein, Pen, and that I will accomplish it by just talking the dam to him until he understands the technical side of it and the ideal I have about it. And if it will influence him, why not the others?"

Pen looked at him thoughtfully. "I believe you can do it, Jim. A sort of silent campaign, eh? And then what?"

"Well, if I can keep Fleckenstein out of Congress by those means, I believe that this project will never repudiate its debt! I am going to get the Department of Agriculture to send a group of experts out here at once. They will help not only the old farmers who over-irrigate but the new farmers who can't farm. And I'm going to get the farmers who have been successful to co-operate with the farmers who have failed. If I only had more time!

"You have three months before election," said Pen. "A lot can be done in three months."

Jim shrugged his shoulders. "I can only do my limit. Among other things I'm

going to try to get the bankers and business men in Cabillo to fight the inflation of land values here on the Project. Incidentally, I'm going to keep on building my dam."

"How can I help?" asked Pen.

"I've told you how," said Jim, quietly.

"Oh, Still, that's not fair!" exclaimed Pen.

"Why not?" asked Jim, coolly. Pen flushed and looked away. They were nearing the tent house and she spoke hastily:

"I'll go in and talk with Sara."

"Better let me," said Jim.

"No," said Pen, "every woman has an inalienable right to bully and intimidate her own husband."

Jim laughed and left her, reluctantly. Pen went into the tent. Sara was looking flushed and tired. The look had been growing on him of late. He had been unusually tractable for a day or so and Pen's heart smote her as she greeted him. No matter how he tried her, Sara never ceased to be a pitiful and a tragic figure to her in his wrecked and aborted youth.

"Sara," she said, her voice very gentle and her touch very tender as she held a glass of water for him, "Jim wanted to come in and talk to you but I wouldn't let him."

Sara pushed the glass away. "Why not?"

"Because you and he quarrel so. Sara, it's a fair fight. You warned Jim that you would ruin him. He says you may have your choice of being watched or turned over to the authorities."

"He is a mutton head!" said Sara. "I suppose he thinks the crux of the matter is that séance with Freet. As if I'd do as coarse work as that! That's what I'd like, to be turned over to the authorities. Couldn't I tell a pretty story about the meeting with Freet up here? Freet actually thought Jim would come across with the contract! But that wasn't what I was after."

"Sara, when you talk like that, I despise you," said Pen.

"You despise me because I'm a cripple," returned Sara. "Why can't you be honest about it?"

"Don't you know me yet, Sara?" asked Pen, sitting down on the foot of his couch and looking at him entreatingly. "Don't you know that if you had taken your injury like a man, you'd have gotten a hold on my tenderness and respect that nothing could have destroyed? Sara, I've watched you degenerate for eight years, but I never realized to what a depth you had sunk until you came to the Project."

"What do you see in the Project," said Sara. "What does it really matter whether private or public interests control it? Who really cares?"

"Lots of people care. Jim cares."

"Pshaw!" sneered Sara. "All Jim Manning really cares about is his own pigheaded sense of race and nationality."

"Jim needs that sense for his propelling power," said Pen. "I believe that just as soon as a man loses his sense of nationality, he loses a lot of his social force. Love of country—a man that hasn't it lacks something very fine, like family pride and honor. Jim's sense of race is the keynote to his character. And just as much as the New Englanders have lost that sense, have they lost their grip on the trend of the nation. They are the type that can't do without it."

Sara eyed Pen curiously. She had turned to look out over the desert distances so that Sara saw her profile clean cut against the sky. She was only a girl and yet she had lived through much. Sara looked at her noble head, high arched above her ears; at her short nose and full soft mouth, at her straight brow, all blending in an outline that was that of the thinker, infinitely sad in its intelligence.

"That was a very highbrow statement of yours, Pen," he said, less harshly than usual. "How did you come to think about these things?"

Pen turned to look at him. "Marrying you made me," she said. "I had to use my mind. I had no family. I had no talents. I had to teach myself a sense of proportion that would keep you from wrecking me. I wanted to get to look at myself as one human living with millions of other humans and not as Pen, the center of her own universe." Pen laughed a little wistfully. "Since I couldn't mother children of my own, naturally, I had to mother the world."

Sara grunted. "Huh! Who can say my life has been altogether a failure?"

Sudden tears sprang to Pen's eyes. "Why, Sara, what a dear thing to say! And I thought you would remove my hair because of Jim's message."

The sneer returned to Sara's voice. "You ask Jim if he ever heard of locking the barn too late? Tell him to bring on his 'armed guards.'"

Pen was startled. "Sara, what have you done?"

Sara laughed. "If you and Jim don't know, I'm not the proper one to tell you! One of your gentleman friends is outside, evidently waiting for you."

Pen looked out. Old Suma-theek was standing on the trail, arms folded, watching the tent patiently. He had had one interview with Sara soon after the crippled man had appeared at the dam. The talk had been desultory and in Pen's presence, but never after could the old Indian be induced to come into the tent.

"He like a broken backed snake, your buck," he had said calmly to Pen, whom he had obviously adored from the first.

Pen came down the trail to see what Suma-theek wanted. She knew there was no hurrying him, so she sat down on a stone and waited. Suma-theek seated himself beside her and rolled a cigarette. After he had smoked half of it, he said:

"Boss Still Jim, he heap sad in his heart."

Pen nodded.

"You love him, Pen Squaw?" asked Suma-theek, earnestly.

"We all do," replied Pen. "He and I have known each other many, many years."

"Don't talky-talk!" cried Suma-theek impatiently. "I mean you love him with a big love?"

Pen looked into Suma-theek's face. She had grown very close to the old Indian. And then, as if the flood in her heart was beyond her control, she said:

"You will never tell, Suma-theek?" and as the Apache shook his head she went on eagerly, "I love him so much that after a while I must go away, old friend, or my heart will break!"

The old Indian shook his head wonderingly. "Whites are crazy fools," he groaned. "You sabez he be here only three months more?"

Pen started. "What do you mean, Suma-theek?"

"You no tell 'em!" warned the old chief. "He tell Suma-theek this morning. Big Boss in Washington tell 'em he only stay three months, then be on any Projects no more."

Pen sat appalled. "Oh, Suma-theek, that can't be true! You couldn't have heard right. I'll go and ask him now."

Suma-theek laid a hand on her arm. "You no talk to him about it! You last one he want to know. I tell you so you go love him, then he no care what happen."

"Oh, Suma-theek, you don't understand! He loves the dam. It will break his heart to leave it. Even I couldn't comfort him for that. Are you sure you are right?"

Yet even as she repeated the question, Pen's own sick heart answered. This was what had put the new strain into Jim's face, the new pleading into his voice.

"How shall I help him," she moaned.

"You no tell him, you sabez," repeated Suma-theek. "He want you think he Boss here long as he can. All men's like that with their squaw."

"I won't tell him," promised Pen. "But what shall I do?" She clasped and unclasped her fingers, then she sprang to her feet. "I know! I know! It will be like a strong arm under his poor overburdened shoulders!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SILENT CAMPAIGN

"I have seen that those humans who seek strength from Nature never fail to find it."

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

Suma-theek waited eagerly. "I'll send for Uncle Benny," said Pen. "He'll leave anything to help Jim."

Suma-theek nodded. "Good medicine. He that fat uncle that love the Big Boss. I sabez him. You get 'em here quick," and Suma-theek sighed with the air of one who had accomplished something.

"I'll telephone a night telegram to Cabillo," said Pen. "He ought to be here in a week. But we mustn't tell the Big Boss or he wouldn't let us do it."

Suma-theek nodded and strolled off. When Pen returned to the tent Sara was full of curiosity, but Pen began to get supper with the remark, "I'm not the proper one to tell you, if you don't know!"

When Pen sent the night telegram, she telephoned to Jane Ames, getting her promise to come up to the dam the next day. As she took the long trail back from the store, where she had gone for privacy in sending her messages, it seemed to Pen that she could not bear to refuse Jim the comfort for which he had begged.

"My one safeguard," she thought, "is to avoid him except where we are chaperoned by half the camp. My poor boy, keeping his real troubles to himself!"

After Sara was asleep that night, Pen slipped over to talk with Mrs. Flynn. The two women were good friends. Sara's ugliness deprived Pen here as it had in New York of the friendship of most women. In the camp were many charming women who had lived lives with their engineering husbands that made them big of soul and sound of body. But Sara would have none of them. So Pen fell back on Mrs. Ames and Mrs. Flynn and the strangely matched trio had many happy hours together.

But Mrs. Flynn was not in her kitchen, nor was she in her little bedroom. Pen wandered into the living room. Mrs. Flynn was not there, but Jim was lying on the couch asleep, his hat on the floor beside him. For many moments Pen stood looking at him. Sleep robbed Jim of his guard of self-control. The man lying on the couch, with face relaxed, lips parted, hair tumbled, looked like the boy whom Pen many a time had wakened on the hearth rug of the old library.

Suddenly, with a little sob, Pen dropped on her knees beside the couch and laid her cheek against Jim's. She felt him wake with a start, then she felt a hand that trembled gently laid on her head.

"Heart's dearest, this is mighty good of you!" said Jim huskily.

Pen did not answer, but she put her hand up and smoothed his hair back from his forehead. Jim seized her fingers and carried them to his lips.

"Sweetheart," he said brokenly, "how am I going to bear it without you or—or anything. Oh, Pen, let's go back to Exham and begin all over again!"

Penelope lifted her head and slipped back until she was sitting on the floor beside the couch, with Jim holding both her hands against his hot cheek.

"You will do this often, won't you, dear?" asked Jim.

Pen shook her head. "Jimmy, about twice more like this and I'd be actually thinking seriously of leaving Sara and marrying you. God help me to keep from ever doing as yellow a thing as that, Still. But, somehow tonight, I thought that just this once would help us both through all the hard months to come. And the memory will be mighty sweet. We—we need a memory to take some of the bitterness out of it all, Still. If I'm wrong in doing this, why the blame is mine alone."

Jim lay silently, holding her hands closer and closer, looking into her face with eyes that did not waver.

Pen smiled and disengaged one hand to smooth his hair again. "I'm a poor preacher. My life is just an endless struggle not to let my mistakes wreck other people as well as myself. Jim, the thing that will be bigger than all we've missed is to make you give the world all the fine force that is in you. We've *got* to save the dam for you and for the country. I shall be with you every moment, Jim, no matter where either of us is, bracing you with all the will I've got. Never forget that!"

Little by little the steel lines crept over Jim's face again. "I shall not forget, little Pen. How sweet you are! How good! How less than a lump of dough I'd be if I didn't put up a good fight after this!—dearest!"

In the silence that followed, they did not take their gaze from each other. Then Pen started, as Mrs. Flynn came in at the front door and stopped with her mouth open. But Jim would not free Pen's hand.

"Mother Flynn must have guessed," he said slowly, "and—she knows us both!"

Mrs. Flynn came over to the couch eagerly. "I do that!" she exclaimed, "and my heart is wore to a string, God knows, sorrowing for the two of you."

"I came in to see you and found Jim asleep and—he's got so much trouble ahead of him, I couldn't help trying to comfort him just this once. I'll never do it again," said Pen, like a child.

Mrs. Flynn threw her apron over her head, then pulled it down again to say, "God knows I'm a good Catholic, but I'm glad you did it. Don't I know what a touch of the hand means to remember? Is there a day of my life I don't live over every caress Timothy Flynn ever gave me? Would I sit in judgment on two as fine as I know the both of you are? I'm going to make us a cup of tea for our nerves."

Jim swung his long legs off the couch and lifted Pen to her feet. "The two of you have tea," he said. "I've had a better tonic. I'm going out for a look at the night shift."

By the time that Mrs. Flynn had bustled about and produced the tea, Pen had regained her composure and was ready to tell Mrs. Flynn of the errand that had brought her to the house, which was that when Jane Ames came up on the morrow the three were to have a council of war on how to help Jim. Wild horse could not have dragged from her what Suma-theek had told her, since Jim so evidently wanted it kept a secret. Nevertheless, all that a woman could do, possessing that knowledge, Pen was going to do.

The next afternoon, while Oscar joined Murphy and Jim, who were having a long talk in Jim's living room, Pen and Mrs. Ames and Mrs. Flynn went up onto the Elephant's back.

Pen's plan was simple. It was merely that she and Jane go among the farmers' wives and campaign against Fleckenstein. "Women's opinions do count, you

know," she said.

"Mine didn't use to," said Jane, "but they do now. I ain't felt so young in years as I have since Oscar and I had that clearing up. It's a splendid idea."

"Where do I come in?" asked Mrs. Flynn, jealously.

"I wanted you to keep an eye on Sara, the days I am away," said Pen. "You are the only one he will let come near him except me."

"Sure I'll do it," said Mrs. Flynn. "I'd take care of a Gila monster if I thought it would do the Boss any good. And Mr. Sara don't sass me so much since I told him what I thought of the Greek church. No! No! I won't tell the Boss. God knows I'm worried thin as a knitting needle now over his worrying."

"Then I'll come down tomorrow, Jane," said Pen. "Bill Evans will take us round. He charges——" Pen blushed and stopped. "I—I—to tell the truth, I have to ask Sara for what I want and I don't know just how to get round it, this time."

Jane in her turn went red. "I'll ask Oscar. I hadn't begun to break him in on that yet. But he's been so nice lately."

Mrs. Flynn stood eying the two women. "Of all the fools, women are the worst," she snorted. "You bet Tim never kept the purse and there never was a happier pair than him and me. Just you wait."

As she spoke, Jim's near mother was exploring the region within her gingham waist and finally she tugged out a chamois skin bag that bulged with bills. "I ain't been down to the bank at Cabillo for months, and that angel boy pays me regular as a clock. How much do you want?"

"Oh, but we can't let you pay out anything, Mrs. Flynn," protested Penelope.

Neither Pen nor Mrs. Ames had seen Mrs. Flynn angry before. "I mustn't, mustn't I?" she shrieked. "Who's got a better right? Who feeds him and launders him and mends him? Don't he call me Mother Flynn? God knows I never thought to see the day to be told I could not do for him! I expect to be doing for him till I die and if God lets me live to spare my life, that'll be a long time yet!"

Pen threw her arms round Mrs. Flynn and kissed her plump cheek. "Bless your dear heart, you shall spend all you want to on Jim."

Mother Flynn sobbed a little. "God knows I'm an old fool, girls! Take what you

want and come back for more."

And thus the campaign for Jim among the farmers' wives was launched.

Neither Oscar nor Murphy had any faith in Jim's "silent campaign." But his own quiet fervor was such that after that Sunday afternoon's talk, both men pledged themselves to help him. Murphy was to play the part of watchdog. Oscar was to work among the farmers.

Oscar Ames never did anything by halves. With Jane urging him from without and his new found faith in Jim urging him from within, he turned his ranch over to the foreman and devoted himself utterly to Jim. The days now were busy ones in the valley as well as on the dam. Jim's eighteen hours a day often stretched into twenty, though he sometimes dozed in his office chair or in the automobile with Oscar, reveling in his new-learned accomplishment, driving at a snail's pace.

During this period Pen saw him only infrequently, for she was much occupied with Sara, who was not so well, when she was not in the valley with Jane Ames. Even when Pen did see Jim, he talked very little. It seemed to her that in his fear lest the secret of his dismissal escape him, he had gone into himself and shut the door even against her.

They did not speak again of watching Sara, but Pen knew that no mail left their tent, no visitor came and went without surveillance. If Sara knew of this, he made no comment. In fact, he did very little now save smoke and stare idly out the door.

Reports of Jim's campaign reached Pen quite regularly, however. Oscar was a very steady source of information.

"He don't say much, you know, and that's what makes a hit," Oscar told Pen and Jane. "For instance, he went over to old Miguel's ranch. Miguel's one of the fellow's been accusing the Boss of raising the cost of the dam so's he could steal the money. Boss, he found old Miguel looking over his ditch that's over a hundred years old. And the Boss, he says as common as an old shoe:

"'Wish I owned the place my fathers built a hundred years ago, Señor Miguel.'

"Miguel, he had had his mind made up for a fight, but started off telling the Boss about old Spanish days in the valley and the Boss, he sits nodding and smoking Miguel's rotten cigarettes and smiling at him sort of sad and friendly like until

old Miguel he thinks the Boss is the only man he ever met that understood him. After two straight hours of this, the Boss he says he'll have to go, but he wishes old Miguel would come up and spend the day and dine with him. Says he's got some serious problems he'd like old Miguel's opinion on. And old Miguel, he follows us clear out to the main road, where we left the machine, and he tells the Boss his house is his and his wife and his daughters and sons are his and his horses and cattle are his and that he will be glad to come up and show him how to build the dam."

"Mrs. Flynn says he's having some farmer up to supper nearly every night," said Jane. "Oscar, how comes it you always speak of Mr. Manning as the Boss, now? You never would call any other man that?"

Oscar squared his big shoulders. "He's the only man I ever met I thought knew more than I do. You ought to hear the things he can tell you about dam building. And he's full of other ideas, too. A lot of what you folks put down as stuckupedness is just quietness on his part while he thinks. I'm trying to pound that into these bullheaded ranchers round here. I tell 'em how to make sand-cement, for instance, and then ask 'em if a fellow didn't have to keep his mouth shut and saw wood while he thought a thing like that out. I'm willing to call him Boss, all right. He's got more in his head than sand cement, too. Last night, we was coming home just before supper. He's been on the job since four in the morning and I knew he had to get back and work half the night on office work. And I says:

"'Boss, what will you get out of it to pay you for half killing yourself this way?'

"He didn't answer me for a long time, then he begun to tell me a story about how he and another fellow went through the Makon canyon and how that other fellow felt about it and how he was drowned and how he had some verses that that fellow taught him printed on his gravestone. Thought I'd remember those lines. They made me feel more religious than anything I've heard at church. Something about Sons of Martha."

Pen had been listening, her heart in her eyes, trying not to envy Oscar his long days with Jim. Now she leaned forward eagerly.

"Oh, I know what he quoted to you:

"'Lift ye the stone or cleave the wood to make a path more or
flat,
Lo, it is black already with blood, some Son of Martha spilled
for that.
Not as a ladder from Earth to Heaven, not as an altar to any
creed,
But simple Service, simply given, to their own kind, in their
common need.'"

The three sat silent for a moment, then Oscar nodded. "That's them. He said he never got their full meaning till just lately and now he's trying to live up to 'em. I'm perfectly willing to call him Boss."

Pen and Jane were not finding the farmers' wives easy to influence. Their task was a double one. First they had to rouse interest in the coming election and then they had to persuade the women that their husbands were wrong. Moreover, after the first week or so, they found that Penelope's presence was a hindrance rather than a help. It was after their call on Mrs. Hunt that they reluctantly reached this conclusion.

Bill rattled them up to a bungalow on one of the new ranches. The Hunts were newcomers, having bad luck with their first attempts at irrigation. Mrs. Hunt was a hearty looking woman of forty. Pen stated the object of the call.

"I never had any interest in politics," said Mrs. Hunt. "I was always too busy with my family to gallivant around."

Jane and Pen plunged earnestly into explanations. When they had finished, Mrs. Hunt said:

"I can see why Mrs. Ames is so interested. But why should you be, Mrs. Sardox? I heard your husband was backing Fleckenstein."

"I don't agree with my husband's ideas," said Pen. "I am doing this because I think Fleckenstein's election will do the valley a deadly wrong."

"Oh, you are one of those eastern women that thinks they know more than their husbands! I am not! I prefer to let my husband do my thinking in politics for me. Does Mr. Manning know you're doing this?"

"Oh, no!" cried Jane. "You don't understand this, Mrs. Hunt."

"I'm no fool," returned Mrs. Hunt. "And I tell you it don't look well for a good-looking young married woman to go round fighting against her husband for a handsome young bachelor like Manning. So there!"

Pen and Jane withdrew with as much dignity as they could muster. It was the sixth rebuff they had received that day. Pen was almost in tears.

"Jane, what are we to do?"

Jane fastened up her linen duster firmly. "One thing is sure, you can't go round with me. One way, you can't blame 'em for looking at it so, drat 'em! I'll just have to carry on this campaign by myself. I wish Mr. Manning could go with me. I don't think he has any idea that he has a way with women. He just sits around looking as if he had a deep-hidden sorrow and all us women fall for it. You and I aren't a bit more sensible than Mrs. Flynn. Here I got a Chinese cook in the house Oscar lugged home. I'd as soon have a rat in the house as one of the nasty yellow things, but Oscar says I got to have him or a dish washing machine, so, after all, I've said I'm up against it. And here I am dashing round the country for Mr. Manning, when I know that Chink is making opium pills in my kitchen."

But Pen was not to be distracted. "What can I do, Jane? Must I just sit with folded hands while the rest of you work?"

"You do your share in supplying ideas, Penelope," said Jane.

Pen answered with a little sob, "I get tired of that job! I want to be on the firing line, just once!"

That night they consulted with Oscar. At first he was very hostile to the thought of either of them undertaking such work. Then in the midst of his tirade on woman's sphere, he stopped with a roar of laughter.

"And I'm a fine example of what a woman can do with a man when she gets busy! All right, Jane, go ahead. Hanged if I ain't proud of you! But Mrs. Pen is hurting the cause. The women folks won't stand for you, Mrs. Pen; you are too pretty."

So Pen withdrew from the campaign and Jane and Bill Evans went on alone.

When Oscar was not with Jim, he brought visitors to the dam. These visitors were farmers and business men from the entire Project. Ames was careful to time the visits, so that about the time he strolled up to the dam site with the

callers, Jim would be on his tour of inspection. Oscar would then follow unostentatiously in Jim's wake, but close enough to get a good idea of the ground that Jim covered. Often he would make Jim stop and give an explanation of some point the visitors could not understand. Penelope, consumed with curiosity, joined the touring party one day.

"I wish you could see him in full action," Oscar was saying. "Like the day of the flood or the night Dad Robins was killed. He can handle fifteen hundred men better'n I handle my three. Now you watch him. Those there fellows he's joshing have been with him seven years. You ought to hear their stories about driving the tunnel up on the Makon. Say, he'd go right in with 'em. Never asked 'em to go somewhere he wouldn't go himself. They all laugh at us farmers, those rough-necks. Say, we don't know a real man when we see one."

The bronzed elderly man who was with Oscar listened intently. Oscar went on:

"The details on a place like this are enough to drive a man crazy. He dassent let 'em pour concrete without him or his cement expert is round. If the rocks aren't just right or the surface of the section isn't just right or they slip up a little on the mixture, the whole thing will go to thunder some day. He's got to spend ten million dollars with eighty million people watching him and all us farmers kicking every minute. How'd you like his job?"

"He was over at my place the other day," said the farmer. "I see how he got his nickname. But he's awful easy to talk to. I got to telling him what a hard time I had the first year or two I was irrigating alfalfa and how I get five good cuttings a year now, regular. He wants me to show that new fellow Hunt how I did it. Guess I will. I always thought Manning hated the farmers. But I guess he was just busy with his own troubles."

Pen fell back and climbed the trail to a point where she could look down on Jim. He was listening to his master mechanic, interjecting a word now and then at which his subordinate nodded eagerly. Pen wondered sadly, what Jim would do with his life when he could no longer work for the Projects. The thought of this sudden thwarting of all his plans haunted her and she longed almost unbearably to talk to him about it, but his silence on the subject she felt that she must respect. As she sauntered on along the trail to meet Bill Evans exploding into camp with the mail, she was thinking back over Jim's life and of how much of it had been spent in listening rather than in speaking. His silence, she thought, was a part of his great personal charm. From it his companions got a sense of a keen,

sympathetic intelligence focused entirely on their own problems that was very attractive. Somehow, Pen had faith that his campaign of silence would defeat Fleckenstein.

Bill had a lone passenger in his tonneau. Pen's pulse quickened. As the machine reached her side, Bill stopped with his usual flourish, and Uncle Denny, without waiting to open the door which was fastened with binding wire, climbed out over the front seat.

"Pen! Pen! The door of me heart has hung sagging and open ever since you left!"

CHAPTER XXIV

UNCLE DENNY GETS BUSY

"Coyotes breed only with coyotes. Men talk much of pride of race, yet they will breed with any color."

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

Pen clung to Uncle Denny with a breathless sob. She had not realized how heavy her burden was until Uncle Denny had come to share it.

"Uncle Denny! You didn't answer my telegram and I didn't dare hope you would get here."

"Where is Jim, Penny, and how is me boy?"

"I'll take you to him now. He has no idea of your coming. Bill, we will walk. Take the trunk on up to Mr. Manning's house, will you?"

"I was afraid 'twould get out and I knew he'd never stand for me coming out to help. That's why I sent you no word," said Uncle Denny, beginning to puff up the trail beside Pen.

"He's just the same old Jim," said Pen, "but under a terrific strain just now, of course. You can understand from my letters just how great that is."

"And Sara?" asked Uncle Denny.

"Not so well," replied Pen. "He is very quiet, these days. There is the first glimpse of the dam, Uncle Denny."

Uncle Denny stopped and wiped the sweat out of his eyes with his silk handkerchief. He gazed in silence for a moment at the mammoth foundations, over which the workmen ran like ants.

"'Twas but a hole in the ground when I last saw it," he said. "Pen, it's so big you can't compass it in your mind. And they are pecking at me boy while he builds mountains!"

"There he is!" exclaimed Pen, pointing to the tower foot.

"It is! It's Still Jim! Is me collar entirely wilted?"

Pen laughed. "Uncle Denny, you're as fussed as a girl at meeting her sweetheart! You look beautiful and you know it. There! He sees us!"

Uncle Denny lost a little of his color and stood still. Jim came striding down the road. His eyes were black with feeling. Without a word he threw his arms around Uncle Dennis and hugged that rotund person off his feet.

"Still Jim, me boy!" cried Uncle Denny. "I've come out to lick the world for ye!"

Jim loosened his bear hug and stepped back. His smile was brilliant.

"Uncle Denny, you look like a tailor's ad! Doesn't he, little Penelope?"

There was something in Jim's voice as he spoke Pen's name that Michael Dennis understood as clearly as if Jim had shouted his feeling for Pen in his ear.

"I'm starving to death," he said hastily. "Take me home, Still. Come along, Pen."

Mrs. Flynn was surveying the trunk as it stood on end in the living room. She was talking rapidly to herself and as the three came up on the porch she cried:

"I said 'twas you, Mr. Dennis! I told myself fifty times 'twas your trunk and still myself kept contradicting me. You are as handsome as a Donegal dude. Leave me out to the kitchen till I get an early supper!"

After supper Jim and Dennis sat for a short time over their pipes before Jim left for some office work.

"Tell me what to do first, Still," said Uncle Denny, "and I'll start a campaign against Fleckenstein that'll turn the valley upside down. That's what I came out for. I'll fix them, the jackals!"

"Uncle Denny, it won't do," answered Jim slowly. "The uncle of a Project engineer can't carry on a political campaign in his behalf. You'd just get me in deeper with the public."

Uncle Denny stared. "But I came out for that very thing."

"I thought you had just come out for one of your usual visits. It won't do, dear Uncle Denny. I can't say anything against Fleckenstein nor must you."

"Me boy," said Michael Dennis, "all the public sentiment on earth can't keep me from fighting Fleckenstein. Pen sent for me and I'm here."

"Pen sent for you?" repeated Jim. "Why, Pen should not have done that."

"This is a poor welcome, Jim," said Uncle Denny, immeasurable reproach in his voice.

Jim sprang to his feet and put a long brown hand on Uncle Denny's shoulder. "You can't mean that, Uncle Denny. It's meat and drink to me to have you here. You can't doubt it."

"I can't, indeed," agreed Dennis heartily. "And somehow, I'm going to help. Go get your work done and then call for me at Pen's house."

Jim had been in the office but a few minutes when he came out again and stood on the edge of the canyon, staring at the silhouette of the Elephant against the night stars. After a moment he turned up the trail toward the tent house. He entered without ceremony and stood a tall, slender, commanding figure against the white of the tent wall. His eyes were big and bright. His lips were stiff as he looked at Sara and said:

"You are fully even now, Saradokis. I've a notion to kill you as I would a rattler."

The tent was bright with lamplight. The red and black Navajo across Sara's cot was as motionless over the outline of his great legs as though it covered a dead man. Uncle Denny stared at Jim without stirring. His florid face paled a little and his bright Irish eyes did not blink.

Pen could see a tiny patch that Mrs. Flynn had put on the knee of Jim's riding breeches. There swept over her a sudden appreciation of Jim's utter simplicity and sincerity under all the stupendous responsibilities he had assumed not only in the building of the dam, but in his less tangible building for the nation. As he stood before them she saw him not as a man but as the boy Uncle Denny often had described to her, announcing the vast discovery of his life work. Would he, had he known the bitter years ahead of him, have chosen the same, she wondered.

"I found two interesting communications in my mail tonight," said Jim, slowly. "One is a letter from the Washington Office containing clippings from eastern papers. Some reporter announces that he has discovered a fully developed scheme of mine and Freet's to sell out to the Transatlantic people. He gives a

twisted version of the conversation here, the other night, that sounds like conclusive evidence. The matter is so well handled that even the Washington office is convinced that I'm a crook. The local papers will, of course, copy this."

Sara did not stir. Jim moistened his lips. "While I knew that I lived under a cloud of suspicion," he said, "I thought to be able to leave the Service with nothing worse than suspicion on my name. I shall never be able to live this down. Yet this is not the worst. I received tonight an anonymous letter. It states that unless I drop my silent campaign, the name of the wife of my crippled friend will be coupled with mine in an unpleasant manner."

Pen's eyes were for a moment horror-stricken. Then they blazed with anger. And so suddenly that Jim and Dennis hardly saw her leave her chair. She sprang over to Sara's couch and struck him across the mouth with her open hand. The stillness in the room for a second was complete, except that Sara breathed heavily as he rose to his elbow.

"I may or may not have produced the newspaper copy, but so help me the God I have blasphemed, I have never used Pen's name," said Sara.

"But you have," said Jim. "You used it before Freet. You probably have cursed me out before Fleckenstein as you did before him and Ames!"

"And there was my trying to help Jane Ames in the valley!" cried Pen suddenly. "She's talking with the farmers' wives for Jim and I went with her until the women were cattish. Oh, Jim, what have we done to you, Sara and I?"

"I shall have to give up the fight a little earlier, that is all," answered Jim. "Don't feel badly, Pen. If I only had some way of punishing Sara and stopping his mischief! Though it's too late now."

"Just be patient, Jim," said Sara. "My mischief will soon end."

Pen had heard only Jim, the first sentence of Jim's remarks. She stood beside the table, white to the lips. "Jim, if you want to wreck my life, stop the fight! Do you suppose, except for the moment's shame, I care what they say about me? If you will only go on with your fight, Jim, let them say what they will. I can stand it. My strength—my strength——" Pen paused with a little sob, as if Uncle Denny reminded her of her girlhood dreams, "my strength is in the eternal hills!"

"I have lived with George Saradokis all these years," Pen went on, "and he's almost broken my faith in life. When I found I could help you, Jim, I thought

that I was making up for some of the wrong of my marriage. I even thought that I'd be willing to go through my marriage again because it had taught me how to help you fight. Jim, it will ruin my life if you stop now!"

And Pen suddenly dropped her face in her hands and broke down entirely. Jim never had seen Pen cry. He took a step toward her, then looked pitifully at Uncle Denny.

Uncle Denny sprang from his chair.

"Go on out, Jim," he said. Then he folded Pen in his arms. "Rest here, sweet, tired bird," he said in his rich voice. "Rest here, for I love you with all me soul."

Jim's lips quivered. He went out into the night and once more climbed the Elephant's back. For a long time he sat, too exhausted by his emotions to think. With head resting on his arms, he let the night wind sweep across him until little by little his brain cleared and he looked about him. Far and wide, the same wonder of the desert night; the stars, so low, so tender, so inscrutable, the sky so deep, so utterly compassionate; the far black scratch of the river on the silver desert, the distant black lift of the mountains—Pen's eternal hills!

Over the flagpole on the office the flag rippled and floated, sank and rose, dancing like a child in the joy of living. Jim looked at it wistfully. Flag that his forefathers had fashioned from the fabric of their vision, must the vision be forgotten? It was a great vision, fit to cover the yearnings of the world. His grandfather had fought for it at Antietam. His father had lost it and had died, bewildered and hungry of soul. Was he himself to lose it, son of vision seekers?

The Elephant beneath him seemed to listen for Jim's reply. "God knows," he said at last, "I would not deny the vision to all the immigrant world. All I wish is that we who made the vision had kept it and had taught it to these others to whom our heritage must go. You can scoff, old Elephant, but the struggle *is* worth while. You can say that nothing matters but Time. I tell you that eternity is made up of soul fights like mine and Pen's!"

Suddenly there came to him the fragment that Pen had quoted to him days before:

> "What though the field be lost?
> All is not lost—the unconquerable will,
> And courage never to submit nor yield;

And what is else, not to be overcome!"

Jim suddenly rose with his blood quickened. "Not to be overcome! And God, what stakes to fight for! To build my father's dream in stone and to make a valley empire out of the tragedy of a woman's soul!"

With renewed strength Jim went down the trail, crossed the canyon and went up to his house.

Uncle Denny was waiting for him. It was nearly midnight. He had kindled a fire in the grate and was brewing some tea. "Mrs. Flynn would have it you'd fallen off a peak but I got her to bed. Have some tea, me boy."

Uncle Denny's voice was cheerful, though his eyes were red. He watched Jim anxiously.

"You should have gone to bed yourself, Uncle Denny. I have a letter to write, then I'm going to turn in."

Uncle Denny's hand shook as he poured the tea. "I had to see you, Still, because I promised Pen I'd go back over there tonight and tell her what your decision was."

Jim caught up his hat. "I'll go!"

But Uncle Denny laid his hand on Jim's arm. "No, me boy. Pen's had all she can stand tonight. I'll take her your word. What shall it be, Still?"

Jim brought his fist down on the table. "Tell her, with her help, I'll keep up the fight!"

Uncle Denny's blue eyes blazed. "I'm prouder of the two of you than I am of me Irish name," he said, and, seizing his hat, he hurried out.

While he was gone Jim wrote this note:

"My dear Mr. Secretary:—Some time ago I wrote you that I did not think an engineer should be asked to build the dam and at the same time handle the human problems connected with the Project. Subsequent events lead me to believe that as your letter suggests it is the duty of the government to look on these Projects not as engineering problems so much as the building of small democracies that may become the living nuclei for the rebirth of all that America once stood for. I do not believe that I am big enough for such a job, but I am

putting up a fight. I have been asked to resign within a few weeks from now. I think, looking at the matter from the point of view I have just expressed, that I am dismissed with justice. This letter is to ask you to see that my successor is chosen with the care that you would give to the founder of a colony."

Uncle Denny returned and waited until Jim had finished his letter. Then he said:

"Sara spoke just once after you left. He denied any knowledge of the anonymous letter."

"I'm going to put it up to Fleckenstein," said Jim. "The newspaper dope, of course, was Sara's. I can only ignore that except to answer any questions the farmers may put to me about it. How is Pen?"

"She cried it out on me shoulder after you left and felt better for the tears. Your message will send her to sleep. Still Jim, if I had a jury of atheists and could put Pen on the stand and make her give her philosophy as she has sweated it out of her young soul, I could make them all believe in the eternal God and His mighty plans. To be bigger than circumstance, that's the acid test for human character."

Jim nodded and looked into the fire. This suggestion that he might be the instrument of a mighty plan, he and Pen and Uncle Denny, awed him. Uncle Denny eyed the fine drooping brown head for a moment.

"Ah, me boy! Me boy!" he said tenderly. "The old house at Exham is not a futile ruin. 'Tis the cocoon that gave birth to the butterfly wings of a great hope. Look up, Still! You've friends with you till the end of the fight."

Jim reached for Michael Dennis' hand and held it with both his own, while he said: "Stay with me for a month or two, Uncle Denny. Don't go away. I need you. I've neither wife nor father and I haven't the gift of speech that makes a man friends."

Jim was off the next morning before daylight. Uncle Denny slept late and while he was eating his breakfast, the ex-saloonkeeper, Murphy, came in.

"The Big Boss sent me up to spend the day with you, Mr. Dennis. He can't get back till late in the afternoon. He told me to talk Project politics to you. My name is Murphy. I'm timekeeper down below, but I've left the job for a while for reasons of my own."

Uncle Denny pulled a chair out for Murphy and looked at him thoughtfully.

"Do you know this jackal, Fleckenstein?"

"I do. The Boss showed me that letter. I suppose you know how a man like Mr. Manning would take to a fellow like Fleckenstein?"

"Know!" snorted Uncle Denny. "Why, young fellow, I'd know Jim's disembodied soul if I met it in an uninhabited desert."

Murphy raised his eyebrows. "You're Irish, I take it."

"You take it right."

"I was born in Dublin myself."

The two men shook hands and Murphy went on. "I told the Boss to forget that letter. I know Fleckenstein. I know all his secrets just as I do about every other man's in the valley. I know their shames and their business grafts. In fact I know everything but the best side of 'em. I've been in the saloon business in this valley for twenty years, Mr. Dennis."

"Ah!" said Uncle Denny. "I understand now!"

"All I've got to do," said Murphy, "is to drop in on Fleckenstein and mention this letter and suggest that my own information is what you might call detailed. 'Twill be enough."

"Of course, it might not be Fleckenstein," said Dennis.

"Never mind! My warning will reach the proper party, if I go to Fleckenstein," said Murphy. He smacked his lips over the cup of coffee Mrs. Flynn set before him.

"And how came you to be helping the Boss instead of distributing booze?" asked Uncle Denny.

"I was about ready to quit, anyhow," said Murphy. "A man gets sick of crooked deals if you give him time. And time was when a man could keep a saloon in this section and still be the leading citizen and his wife could hold up her head with the banker's wife. That time's gone. I've been thinking for a long time of marrying and settling down. Then the Boss cleaned me out." Murphy chuckled.

"How was that?" asked Dennis. Mrs. Flynn began to clear the table very slowly.

"Well, this is the way of it," and Murphy told the story of his first meeting with

Jim. "I've seen him in action, you see," he concluded, "and I'd be sorry for Fleckenstein if he crosses the Boss's path."

"Jim'll never trouble himself to kick the jackal!" said Uncle Denny.

"Huh! You don't know that boy. There was a look in his eye this morning—God help Fleckenstein if he meets the Big Boss—but he'll avoid the Boss like poison."

Uncle Denny shook his head. "What kind is Fleckenstein?"

"What kind of a man would be countenancing a letter like that?" Then Murphy laughed. "The first time I ever saw Fleckenstein he was riding in the stage that ran west from Cabillo. Bill Evans was driving and Fleckenstein got to knocking this country and telling about the real folks back East. Bill stood it for an hour, then he turned round and said: 'Why, damn your soul, we make better men than you in this country out of binding wire! What do you say to that?' And Fleckenstein shut up."

Uncle Denny chuckled. "Have a cigar? Is Jim making any headway in this 'silent campaign' I'm hearing about?"

"Thanks," said Murphy. "Well, he is and he ain't. He's got a great personality and everybody who gets his number will eat sand for him. He made a great speech at Cabillo, time of the Hearing. He said the dam was his thumb-print—kind of like the mounds the Injuns left, I guess. People are kind of coupling that speech up now with him when they meet him and they are beginning to have their doubts about his dishonesty. But I don't believe he can get his other idea across on the farmers and rough-necks in time to lick Fleckenstein."

"And what is his other idea?" asked Dennis.

Murphy smoked and stared into space for a time before he answered. "I can best tell you that by giving you an incident. I went with Ames and the Boss while he called on a farmer named Marshall. Marshall is a bright man and no drinker. He has been loud in his howls about the Boss being incompetent and kicking about the farmer having to pay the building charges. Marshall was cleaning his buckboard and the Boss, sort of easy like, picks up a brush and starts to brush the cushion.

"'My father used to make me sweep the chicken coop,' says the Boss. 'We were too poor to keep a horse. If I couldn't build a dam better than I used to sweep that

coop, I'd deserve all you folks say about me.'

"He says this so sort of sad like that Marshall can't help laughing, and he starts in telling how he used to sojer when he was a kid. And once started, with the Boss looking like his heart would melt out of his eyes, Marshall kept it up till the whole of his life lay before the Boss like an illustrated Sunday Supplement.

"'You've had great experiences,' says the Boss. 'I've not had much experience in dealing with men as you have. I'm wondering if you would help me get this idea across with the folks round here. I want them to see this; that America has never made a more magnificent experiment to see if us folks can handle our own big business and pay a debt contracted by ourselves. I'd like to see this done, Marshall,' he says sad like, 'as a sort of last legacy of the New England spirit, for we old New Englanders are going, Marshall, same as the buffalo and the Indian.'

"Something about the way he said it sort of made your eyes sting and Marshall says, rough-like, 'I'll think it over and I'd just as soon tell what you said to the neighbors,' Then, while the Boss went up to the house to get a drink of water, Marshall says to us, 'He's got a good shaped head. I wouldn't a made so many fool cracks about him if I'd known he could be so sort of friendly and decent.'"

During this recital, Mrs. Flynn had drawn near and now with eyes on Murphy she was absently polishing the teaspoons with the dustcloth.

"Why don't you send some of those folks to me?" she cried. "I'd tell 'em a thing or two about the Big Boss. There's a letter over there now on the desk from the German government, asking him questions and offering him a job. Incompetent!"

"How do you know what's in the letter, Mrs. Flynn?" asked Uncle Denny, with a wink at Murphy.

"Because I read it," returned Mrs. Flynn, with shameless candor. "Somebody's got to keep track of the respects that's paid that poor boy or nobody'd ever know it. God knows I hate the Dutch, but they know a good man when they hear of one better than the Americans. And I wish you two'd get out of here while I set the table for dinner."

The two men laughed and got their hats. "I'll meet you at the office shortly," said Uncle Denny. "I've a call to make."

Pen was sitting on the doorstep when Uncle Denny came up. She was looking

very tired and her cheeks were flushed. She rose and led him away from the tent.

"Sara is very sick, Uncle Denny. I've given him some morphine, but he'll be coming out of it soon. Will you telephone from the office for the doctor?"

"Is it the same old pain?" asked Dennis.

"Yes, only worse. I—I am to blame, in a way. He has been growing worse lately and any excitement is dreadful for him. And then, I struck him, Uncle Denny! I shall never forgive myself for that. And yet, this morning he laughed at it. He said he never had thought so much of me as he had for that slap."

Uncle Denny nodded. "He's deserved it a hundred times, Penny! That never made him worse. But this is no place for him. When I go back to New York, you and he must go with me."

"Yes, I have felt the same way, about the excitement here. We'll go when you say, Uncle Denny."

"Is the doctor here a good one?"

"Splendid! A Johns Hopkins man here for his health."

"What else can I do?" asked Uncle Denny. "Shall I come in and sit with him?"

"No; ask Mrs. Flynn to come over after dinner. You go out and see the dam and be proud of your boy."

"And of me girl," said Uncle Denny. He had been standing with his hat in his hand and now he bent and kissed Pen's cheek.

"Erin go bragh!" said Pen. "Uncle Denny, I'm tired! I feel as if I were running on one cylinder and three punctured tires. I have to talk that way after my close association with Bill Evans!"

Uncle Denny had a delightful trip over the Project with Murphy. He dined with the upper mess so that Mrs. Flynn could devote herself to Pen. After eating, he started down the great road to the tower foot to meet Murphy.

Before he came to the tower, however, he came on a group of men hovering over the canyon edge. Uncle Denny gave an exclamation of pity. A mule with a pack on its back had slipped off the road and hung far below by the rope halter that had caught around a projecting rock. The hombre who had been driving the mule

had gone for ropes.

"See how still he keeps, the old cuss," said Jack Henderson gently. "A horse would have kicked himself to death long ago. That mule knows just what's holding him. A mule forgets more in a minute than a horse knows in a year."

Uncle Denny almost wept. The mule pressed his helpless forelegs against the wall and except that he panted with fright and that his ears moved back and forth as he listened for his hombre's voice, he was motionless. His liquid eyes were fastened on the group above with an appeal that touched every man there.

"What can you do for the poor brute!" cried Uncle Denny.

"Wait till the hombre gets back," said Henderson. "If he can hang on that long, we can save him. Nothing like this happens to a mule very often. You can't get a mule to try a trail that isn't wide enough for his pack. They can reason, the old fools! Bill Evans' auto shoved this fellow over. The steering gear broke."

At this moment a panting hombre arrived with two coils of rope. The men hastily fastened one rope under the Mexican's arms. He seized the other and they lowered him into the canyon. He talked to the mule in soft Spanish all the way down and the great beast began to answer him with deep groans. With infinite care, the hombre cut the packs loose and they went crashing into the river bed. Still the mule did not move. His driver carefully made the rope fast round the mule. The waiting men then drew the little Mexican up, and when he was safe all hands, including Uncle Denny, drew the mule up. When the big gray reached the road, he tried each leg with a gentle shake, walked over to the inside edge of the road and lifted his voice in a bray that shook the heavens.

The men laughed and patted him. "When I was in the Verde river country one spring, years ago," said Henderson, in his tender, singing voice, "I had a mule train up in the hills. They was none of them broke and they wouldn't cross the river till I took off my clothes and swam with 'em, one at a time. It was fearful cold. The water was just melted snow and I was some mad. But I finally got all but one across. He was a big gray like this. I was so cold and so hungry and so mad, I tied his head up a tree and swam off and left him to die.

"I made camp across the river and two or three times in the night I woke up and thought of that old gray mule. I was still sore at him, but I made up my mind I wouldn't go off and leave him to starve to death, that I'd shoot him in the morning. But in the morning I got to looking at him and I was afraid a shot from

across the river would just wound him. I wouldn't risk my gun again in the water, so I takes off my clothes, takes my knife in my teeth and," Henderson's voice was very sweet as he scratched the mule's ear, "and swims back to cut his throat. When I got up to him I cussed him out good. And I says, 'I'll give you one more chance. Either you swim or I cut your throat.' I untied him and that old gray walked down to the water's edge and you'd ought to see him hustle in and swim! He'd reasoned out I was a man of my word!"

Jim had come up in time to hear the story and when Henderson had finished he said: "I've always claimed it was the mules that built the government dams. What would we have done with our fearful trails and distance and heavy freight without the mule? Some day when I get time, I'll write a rhapsody on the mule."

The men laughed and made way for the doctor on his horse. But the doctor stopped and spoke very gravely to Uncle Denny.

"Mrs. Saradokis wants you. Her husband is very low."

CHAPTER XXV

SARA GOES ON A JOURNEY

"Love is the speaking voice of the Great Hunger. Happy the human who has found one great love. All nature speaks in him profoundly."

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

Jim started up the road but Mr. Dennis stopped long enough to say, "Oughtn't you to be there, doctor?"

The doctor nodded. "I'll be back as soon as I can. They've just brought an hombre with a crushed leg into the hospital. Mrs. Flynn knows what to do and so does his wife. He may go any time."

Uncle Denny panted after Jim, but before they reached the tent house, Mrs. Flynn stopped them on the trail.

"It's all over," she said. "I've taken Mrs. Penelope over to our house. I'll take charge up here."

"You don't mean Saradokis is dead?" cried Uncle Denny.

"He is, God rest his poor wicked soul!"

Jim stood white and rigid. "Did I hasten this with my scene last night, I wonder!" he asked huskily.

Mrs. Flynn shook her head. "The doctor told me a month ago not to go out of reach of the tent house. That this was liable to come any time. He came out of the morphine near noon, held Mrs. Pen's hand and said she had slapped a lot of the bitterness out of his heart last night. Then he went to sleep and never woke up. Mr. Dennis, you go to Mrs. Penelope. Boss, you go and do the telegraphing that's necessary."

It was supper time before Jim could leave the business of the dam and get up to his house. He and Uncle Denny had finished supper when Pen came out of Mrs. Flynn's room. She was white and spent, but she had not been crying.

"Still," she said, "I want you to persuade Uncle Denny not to go back East with me and poor Sara. I am perfectly well and quite able to make the trip alone. Uncle Denny is needed here."

"It's not to be thought of!" cried Dennis. "When the first shock is over I'm looking for you to go to pieces and I propose to be on the job."

"Uncle Denny," said Pen quietly, "I shall not go to pieces. I feel the tragedy of Sara's life very deeply and I am very sad over it all. But I'm not a widow. I'm a nurse and friend whose job is over. It will be a pitiful journey to take Sara back to his father. But I shall be with dear Aunt Mary in New York. I shall get no rest unless I know that you are with Jim in this critical moment of his career."

The two men looked at each other uncertainly. Suddenly Pen's voice shook: "Oh, don't make me argue!"

Jim spoke slowly: "We never have regretted doing what Pen told us to, Uncle Denny. It looks heartless, but I guess we'll have to obey."

"Me soul in me is like a whirling Dervish," said Uncle Denny, "with both of you needing me so. You'll have to decide betwixt you."

"Then Uncle Denny will stay here and we will take you over for the five o'clock morning train, Pen. Mrs. Flynn has packed your trunk and poor Sara is ready for his last trip. When shall we look for your return, little Penelope?"

Pen looked a little bewildered. "Why, there is no excuse for my coming back. I shall stay with your mother until I get rested and then I must find something to do."

Uncle Denny jumped up and stood with his back to the fireplace while Jim leaned on the back of Pen's chair.

"Listen to me, children," said Dennis. "Of what use is it to beat about the bush and refuse to speak what's in the heart of each of us? How can we pretend that poor Sara's death is not God's own relief to him and us? We can weep, as Pen says, over the tragedy of his life, but not that he is gone. Your talk of going to work is nonsense, me sweet Pen. After a few months you will marry Jim and have the happiness you have earned so dearly."

Jim did not move. Pen's pale face turned scarlet. "Oh, Uncle Denny," she cried, "don't talk to me of marriage! I love Jim dearly, but now this is all over I have

left only a deadly fear of marriage!"

"Pen! Pen!" exclaimed Uncle Denny. "What do you know of marriage? For every unhappy marriage we hear of there are three of such sweet companionship that its sharers hide it from the world as if 'twere too sacred for the common gaze. The perfect friendship is between man and woman and when you add to that the sacrament of body and soul, you have the only heaven humans may know on earth. And 'tis enough. 'Tis full compensation for all the ills of life."

"Jane Ames has been talking to me that way lately," said Pen, her eyes full of tears. "But you nor she never really had your dreams destroyed as I have." She paused and went on as if half to herself: "And yet nothing has come into my life so revivifying and wholesome as Oscar and Jane's finding each other after all these years. Perhaps there is something in marriage I don't know. Jane says there is. But—Oh, I am so tired!"

Jim moved round to Uncle Denny's side. "It's good of Uncle Denny to plead for me, isn't it, Penny? But you are in no state now to listen to him or me, either. Go back to mother, and don't work, but play. You've forgotten how to play. I remember that long ago when Uncle Denny wanted mother to marry him he told her that marrying him would give me my chance to play, that I couldn't come to my full strength without play. Grown-ups need play, too, little Pen. Go back for a while and rest and take up your tennis again and go to Coney Island with mother. Go and play, Penny. And some day I'll come back and play with you."

Pen gave a little sigh. Suddenly her tense nerves relaxed and she settled back in her chair with a little color in her cheeks.

Uncle Denny cleared his throat. "Tell Mrs. Flynn to fetch her some tea and toast, me boy. Then she must go to bed for a few hours."

The automobile, with Henderson at the wheel, was at the door before dawn. Jim had sent poor Sara on before midnight. Uncle Denny put Pen and Jim into the tonneau, then climbed up beside Henderson and the machine shot swiftly out on the great road.

Pen did not speak for some time and Jim did not disturb her. She looked back at the Elephant as long as she could discern the great meditative form in the starlight. Then, after they had gotten into the hills and were winging like night birds up the mountain road, Jim felt a cold little hand slip into his lean, warm paw.

Jim's heart gave a thud. He leaned forward to look into Pen's face. It was dim in the starlight, but he saw that she smiled slightly. Jim leaned back, feeling as if he could overturn worlds with this thrill in his veins.

The great road curled like a hair among the dim black mountain tops. The machine flew lightly. Uncle Denny and Henderson talked quietly, and at last, under cover of their speech and the whirr of the engine, Pen began to talk softly to Jim.

"I am hoping that in the years to come I can remember Sara as a college boy, so full of life and ambition! He was a beautiful boy, Still, wasn't he?"

"Yes, little Pen, I loved him very much, then."

"Life was unfair to him to give him a greater burden than he was designed to bear," said Pen. "I shall miss the care of him. I am going to miss the demands he made on my best spiritual effort. I'm going to sag like a fiddle string released. If only he has gone on now to a better chance! Poor, poor tortured Sara!"

Jim rubbed the little twitching fingers and Pen leaned against his shoulder softly as though she needed his nearness to steady her. She went on a little brokenly:

"'Envy and calumny and hate and pain
And that unrest which men miscall delight
Can touch him not and torture not again——'

"I guess I won't get over the scarring, Still. I'm so tired."

"You've the priceless gift of youth, dear Penny," said Jim softly. "Go and play, sweetheart."

There was a long silence. Dawn was marching on the mountain tops. Penelope watched the silver glory of the star-studded sky and she said in a steadier tone:

"'Life like a dome of many colored glass
Stains the white radiance of Eternity
Until death tramples it to fragments——'"

A sudden scarlet revealed itself on a far peak. It was like a marvelous translucent ruby, set in a silver mist.

Uncle Denny turned. "Henderson says we are right on the railroad."

"We are," replied Jim, "and yonder is the train."

The automobile drew into the station with the train and Uncle Denny, with Henderson, helped embark poor Sara on his last ride, while Jim put Pen aboard the train. Pen followed Jim back onto the train platform. Jim shook hands with her and stood on the lower step waiting for the train to start. His face in the dawn light was very wistful. Suddenly Pen's lips quivered. Just as the train began to move, "Jim!" she whispered. And she leaned over and caught his face between her hands and kissed him quickly on the lips. Then she slipped into the coach. Jim dropped off the train and stood staring unseeingly at Uncle Denny and Henderson. A to-hee sang its morning song from a nearby cactus:

"O yahee! O yahai!
Sweet as arrow weed in spring!"

"Put your hat on, me boy," said Uncle Denny, who had not seen the little episode, "and come on." He led the way to the machine and climbed in beside Jim. "Well, Still, she's gone!"

Jim turned and looked at his Uncle Denny. "She's not gone for long. When I

have finished the Project fight I shall go after her."

"Did she agree?" asked Uncle Denny eagerly.

"No," said Jim serenely. "She's in the frame of mind that's to be expected after the life she's lived with Sara. She is afraid of everything. After the election, I shall go to her. She and I have missed enough of each other."

Dennis brought his fist down on his knee. "Then that's settled right, thank God!" he said to the dawn at large.

The next day Mrs. Ames came up to the dam. She was inconsolable that she had not been sent for, to help Pen and Mrs. Flynn's air of superiority was not soothing. Uncle Denny took to Mrs. Ames at once.

"I've done nothing but gad for Mr. Manning, lately," she said.

"How are things going?" asked Mrs. Flynn. "Has Bill Evans got all the money yet?"

"Eh? What's this?" exclaimed Uncle Denny.

"Mrs. Pen thought it would do a lot of good if we could get the farmers' wives to working against Fleckenstein," said Jane. "I've been calling on a lot of them. Bill Evans takes me in his auto."

"Who pays Bill?" asked Uncle Denny. "Ames?"

"He does not, though he honestly offered to," said Jane. "This is a woman's job. Mrs. Flynn is paying for it. And don't you tell Mr. Manning. So far he hasn't asked any questions. Oscar says he's too worried over other things."

"Bless us!" cried Uncle Denny. "That won't do! You must let me straighten it up."

Mrs. Flynn rapped on the table with the dripping mixing spoon with which she had followed Jane in from the kitchen. "Michael Dennis! You will not! What's me money for if it ain't for him? Ain't he all I've got in the wide world and you grutch me that? God knows I never thought I'd come to this to be told I couldn't do for him! If God lets me live to spare my life I hope to spend every cent I've got back on the Boss."

Uncle Denny nodded. "All right! You're a good woman, Mrs. Flynn. How is

your campaign going, Mrs. Ames?"

Jane shook her head. "You never know which way a woman will jump. If only Fleckenstein can be beaten, it will be Mr. Manning's personality that beats him, and after that he can do whatever he wants to with the valley. But the election is only a little way off and I'm scared to death. I've talked and visited until I'm ashamed of myself. And there's only one woman in the valley I'm sure of."

"Who is she?" asked Uncle Denny.

"That's Mrs. Cady, a rich widow who lives near Cabillo. She's the terror of the valley. She's a scold and she holds half the mortgages in the county. She stopped Mr. Manning a while ago and asked what he meant by running one of the canals the way it was. Then, just because he's always nice to a woman, Mr. Manning stands and lets her explain his business to him for half an hour. When she got through he thanked her and said it was always wise to trust a woman's intuition. She thought she'd taught him a real valuable lesson and she said he was the only man she ever saw that knew good advice when he got it. Well, when I went round to her the other day and told her what Mr. Manning was up against, she flew round like a wet hen. I've heard she threatened to foreclose on anyone that voted for Fleckenstein."

Uncle Denny chuckled. "And the boy thinks he has no friends!"

The fight into which Jim had thrown himself was an intangible one. He knew that he could not save his job for himself, but he believed that if he could defeat Fleckenstein, he would have made the farmers assume a responsibility for the Project that would never be lost.

Uncle Denny did not tell Jim that he knew that every day lessened Jim's term of office on the dam. He asked no embarrassing questions. One day, as they stood looking at the dam slowly emerging from the river bed to lie in the utter beauty of strength at the Elephant's feet, Jim said:

"I wonder if another man will love the dam as I have. There is not a stone in it that I don't know and care for."

But Uncle Denny only nodded and said in reply, "A man must love the thing he creates whether it's a dam or a child." But his heart ached within him.

The Department of Agriculture had responded immediately and half a dozen experts already were at work on the Project. The older farmers resented any

suggestions that were made regarding their methods, but little by little the newcomers were turning to the experts, and Jim believed that even in a year scientific farming would be a settled fact on the Project.

Every moment that Jim could spare from hastening the work on the dam he spent in the valley with the farmers. He did not harangue. He had come to realize that deep within us all dwells a hunger of the soul on which, when roused, the world wings forward. So he induced these men to talk to him and listened, wondering at the deeps he touched. He did not realize that often they were ashamed to show him narrowness or selfishness when through his wistful silence they glimpsed his unsatisfied visioning. Nothing in life is so contagious as a great dream.

As far as the Project was concerned, the story of Jim's alleged interview with Freet made little impression, after all. Insinuations and accusations had appeared so often about the engineers of the dam in the local papers that they had ceased to be a sensation. In the East, though, Jim knew the story would leave its permanent imprint. Murphy interviewed Fleckenstein and never would tell what he and the politician said to each other. But the threat of the letter never was carried out. Fleckenstein continued a vigorous campaign, however. Money and whiskey flowed freely and Fleckenstein saw every man that Jim saw.

Uncle Denny was only temporarily dismayed by Jim's refusal to allow him to work openly against Fleckenstein. Mrs. Ames, having come to the end of her talking capacity, he hired Bill Evans and his machine for the remaining six weeks of the campaign. Bill was quite willing to let the hogs go hungry while he and his machine were in demand.

Uncle Denny said: "A twenty-mile ride in Bill's tonneau is better as a flesh reducer than ten hours in a Turkish bath. It is the truth when I tell folks I'm riding for me health."

Uncle Denny made himself newsgetter-in-chief for Jim. He scoured the valley for reports on the state of mind of every water user and business man on the Project. Oscar and Murphy, when not with Jim, devoted themselves to Uncle Denny. Both the men were frankly giving all their time to the Project these days.

The weeks sped by all too rapidly. One evening Uncle Denny called a conference at Jim's house. Jim, coming home from the office at ten o'clock that night, found Murphy and Henderson and Oscar awaiting him with Uncle Denny as master of ceremonies.

"Me boy," said Uncle Denny, "there's going to be a landslide for Fleckenstein."

Jim nodded. "I think so. Well, anyhow, I've made one or two friends below who'll remember after I'm gone some of the things I've wanted for the Project."

Uncle Denny, standing before the grate, looked at Jim in a troubled way. The Big Boss, as he loved to call Jim, was looking very tired.

"Well," said Murphy, "Fleckenstein can't make much trouble for a year. Even after he takes his seat it will take time to start things even with the money from the Trust. And in the meantime the Big Boss will be able to put up a great counter-irritant out here if what he's done the last few weeks is any sample."

Jim lighted his pipe and leaned back in his chair. "I won't be here, boys," he said. "This is confidential. I have been asked for my resignation and it takes effect the day after election."

There was utter silence in the room for a moment, then Henderson leaned forward and spat past Uncle Denny into the grate.

"Hell's fire!" he said gently.

"How long have you known this, Boss?" asked Murphy.

"Nearly three months," answered Jim.

"Pen told me," said Dennis. "Suma-theek told her."

Jim looked up in astonishment, then he shook his head. "I'm sorry Pen has that to bother her, too."

Murphy jumped to his feet. "And you have known this three months and never told us! Is that any way to treat your friends? Do you suppose we want to lie by and see you licked off this dam like a yellow cur? It's no use for you to ask this to be kept quiet, Boss. I won't do it."

Jim rose and pointed his pipe at Murphy. "Murphy, if you try to use this confidential talk to raise sentiment for me, I'll fire you!"

"You can't fire my friendship!" shouted Murphy. "You can have my job any time you want it!"

Here Oscar Ames spoke for the first time. "When's Mrs. Penelope coming back?"

"Don't you get her out here," said Jim. "She can do no good and she needs peace and quiet."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE END OF THE SILENT CAMPAIGN

"The dream in them of a greater good lifts humans from the level of brutes. Take this dream from them and they are like quenched comets."

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

It was Oscar's turn to get to his feet. "Manning," he said, "ain't you learned your lesson yet? Who was it kicked me out of the dirty political scrape I was getting into and made me see straight? Huh? Who was it? Well, it was my wife. And who woke my wife up? It was Mrs. Pen, wasn't it? And who, by your own admission, showed you things you'd been seeing crooked all your life? Huh? 'Twas Mrs. Pen, wasn't it? You're as moss-bound in lots of ways as a farmer. Now I've learned my lesson. I'm willing to admit that women folks has got intuitions that beat our fine ideas all hollow. She may not do us any good. But I want to know what she thinks about things. I'll be yelling votes for women next. Gimme her address. I'm going to send her a night message they'll have to use an adding machine to count the words in."

"What can be done in a week?" asked Jim, with his first show of irritation. "I won't have her bothered, I tell you."

"Still Jim," said Uncle Denny, "do you suppose she's thought of anything else but the situation out here, excepting, of course, poor Sara? And Pen's Irish! Even long distance fighting has charms for her."

Henderson looked at Jim's dark circled eyes and his compressed lips. "Go to bed, Boss," he said in his tender voice. "See if you can't get some sleep. You have done your best. Is there anyone in the valley you ain't seen yet?"

"Two or three," said Jim.

"See them," said Henderson. "We are going to put up a fight to keep you here, Mr. Manning."

Jim started for his bedroom door, then he came back and said slowly: "I don't want you fellows to misunderstand me. I'm the least important item in this

matter. I admit that it's crucifying me to leave the dam, but there is no doubt they can find a better man than I am for the job. I woke up too late. You folks must keep on in one last fight against Fleckenstein. For Fleckenstein stands for repudiation. Repudiation means the undermining of the basic principle of the Reclamation Service. And the loss of that principle means the loss of the Projects as a great working ideal for America. It was that principle that was the real kernel of the New England dream in this country. We've got to work not so much for equality in freedom as for equality in responsibility to the nation. Don't waste a moment on keeping me here. Make one last effort to defeat Fleckenstein."

Then Jim went into his room and closed the door.

When he had gone, Murphy said in a low voice: "It's too late to lick Fleckenstein. Are we going to lie down on the Boss losing his job, boys?"

"Not till I've beaten the face off Fleckenstein," said Henderson, softly.

"I want to get in touch with Mrs. Pen," said Oscar Ames.

"Aw, forget it, Ames!" said Murphy. "I don't doubt she's a smart girl, but this is no suffragette meeting."

"Don't try to start anything," said Oscar. "Wait till you're married for thirty years like me and maybe you'll have learned a thing or two."

"Don't quarrel, boys," said Uncle Denny. "Me heart is like lead within me. How can I think of Jim as anywhere but with the Service?"

"If he goes, I go," said Henderson. "The only reason I stayed up on the Makon was because of him. What's the matter with the wooden heads in this country? I'd like to be fool killer for a year."

Murphy was chewing his cigar. "You'd have to commit suicide if you was," he said. "I've tried everything against Fleckenstein except the one way to swing votes in America and that's with whiskey or dollars. Under the circumstance we can't use either. I'm going to turn in. I'm at the end of my rope."

Henderson followed Murphy to the door. Oscar Ames forgot to lower his voice. He squared his big shoulders and shouted: "You blame quitters! I ain't ashamed to ask women for ideas if you are. The women got me into this fight and I'll bet they get me out."

He nodded belligerently at Uncle Denny and strode out into the night. Uncle Denny, left alone in the living room, stood long on the hearthrug, talking to himself and now and again shaking his head despondently.

"I mind how after he found himself, he was always making trails in front of the old fireplace in the brownstone front. I mind how he first heard of the Reclamation Service. 'How'd you like that, Uncle Denny,' he said, 'James Manning, U.S.R.S.' What'll he do now, poor lad?

"Thank God his father's dead, for if he felt worse than I do he'd kill himself. No! No! I'll not say that! He'd have felt like meself that 'twas worth all the sorrow to hear Still put his idea ahead of himself as he did tonight. That's the test of a man's sincerity. And in her heart, his mother'll be glad. She's always worried lest he get killed on one of his dams, bless her heart."

Uncle Denny moved about the room, closing the door and putting away the cigars. He picked Jim's hat off the floor and patted it softly as he hung it up.

"What'll he do now, poor boy?" he murmured. Then he turned out the light and went to bed.

Jim received a message the next morning, saying that a certain Herr Gluck would reach the dam that afternoon.

"And who is he?" asked Uncle Denny.

"He's an engineer the German government is sending over to see some of the stunts I've been doing on the dam," said Jim. "I'll show him round, then I'll turn him over to you for the hour before supper. I want to see old Miguel, who is coming up to the dam."

"I'm itching to lay hands on him. Does he speak English?"

Jim laughed. "Better than I do. He's written me a couple of times."

Jim brought Herr Gluck in over the great road. The German was full of enthusiasm. "Blasted from solid rock! How not like America! This was built for the future! How did you come to do it?"

Jim smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"You belong not to this country," Herr Gluck went on, "you belong to the old world where they build for their descendants."

Jim thoroughly enjoyed the long afternoon on the dam with the German. Herr Gluck's questions were searching and invigorating. They took Jim out of himself and he showed Herr Gluck a scientific knowledge and enthusiasm that few people were fitted to appreciate.

At five o'clock Jim took Herr Gluck up to his house and turned him over to Uncle Denny. The rotund, flaxen-haired German and the rotund, gray-haired Irishman took stock of each other. Uncle Denny moved two chairs before the open door.

Herr Gluck sat down. "Himmel! What beauty!" he exclaimed, as the faint lavender distances with the far mountains flashing sunset gold met his gaze. "Not strange that Mr. Manning has enthusiasm."

Uncle Denny sighed in a relieved way as if he had catalogued the newcomer.

"They say," said Dennis, "that a man must close his soul to the Big Country or else he will become great or go mad. And do you think me boy has done good work here, Herr Gluck?"

The German made some extraordinary rings of smoke and nodded his head slowly. "He has done some daring things well that may not be great in themselves, but they show imagination. That is the point. He has imagination. Many are the engineers who are accurate, who are trustworthy, but imagination, creative ability, no! You observe the shape of his head, his jaw, his hands—the dreamer, urged into action. And the impudence of his sand-cement idea! In my country we dare make our concrete only very rich. He shows me this afternoon that diluted rightly with sand, cement can be made stronger." Herr Gluck chuckled delightedly.

Uncle Denny almost purred. "He was so as a lad. He was captain of his school football teams because he could think of more wild tactics than all the rest of them put together. And always got away with them, looking sad and never an unnecessary word."

Herr Gluck nodded. "He is so valuable here that I think it not possible I get him to come to Germany yet?"

Michael Dennis got red in the face and took a long breath. "But they don't appreciate him here. He's been asked to resign in a few days now."

The German's round eyes grew rounder. "Nein! And why? Has he got into

foolishness? He is young, they must remember."

"It's a long tale," said Uncle Denny, "but I'll tell it to you," and he plunged into the story of the Project.

Herr Gluck listened breathlessly.

"And so you see," Dennis ended, "that for all he has done he feels he's failed, for everything the dam has stood for in his mind has come to naught. And that's a bad feeling for a man as young as Jim. He'll never readjust himself, Jim won't. He can get another job but his life's big dream will have gone to smash. His inspiration will be gone. And what will he do then, poor boy?"

"But it's impossible," persisted Herr Gluck. "He's a valuable man. It is not possible they would dismiss him. Some day when he is older he will do great things your country can't afford to lose. What is the matter with your Head of the Service?"

"Impossible!" snorted Uncle Denny. "Impossible! The word is not in the vocabulary of the American politician. The Director is all right, a fine clean fellow. But he can't help himself. It's either Jim or the Project to be smirched. They won't be satisfied, the politicians, till they get the Service attached to the Spoils system. What do they care for scientific achievement? Soul of me soul! I'd like to be Secretary of the Interior for fifteen minutes. I'd discharge everyone in the Department, ending with meself."

Herr Gluck was visibly excited. "I tell you it is not possible! He's a great engineer in the making? They cannot know it or they would not so do."

Uncle Denny lost patience. "I'm telling you it is so! Don't you know that nothing is impossible to ignorant men?" he shouted. "Didn't ignorance crucify Christ? Didn't the ignorant make Galileo deny his world was round? Didn't ignorance burn Joan of Arc at the stake? Every advance the world has made has been with bloody footsteps. Don't we always kill the man in the vanguard and use his body as a bridge to cross the gulf of our own fear and ignorance? I tell you, I fear ignorance!"

Herr Gluck rose and shook his plump fist in Uncle Denny's face. "Those are days gone by in my country," he roared. "They may be true in this raw land or in besotted Ireland, but in the Fatherland we worship brain. Do not include the Fatherland in your recriminations! Once in a while you accomplish great things

in your foolish country here with its hysteria and frothing and bubbling. But come to my country if you would see the quiet patient advance of noble science with scientists revered like kings."

"There were colleges in Ireland," shouted Uncle Denny, "when your ancestors were wearing fur breech clouts and using cairns for books!"

Jim came slowly up the trail and Uncle Denny and Herr Gluck sat down a little sheepishly. Herr Gluck did not waste any time in preliminaries as Jim came in the door.

"Your Uncle tells me of the trouble here on the dam," he said. "My government is undertaking some great work which I will describe to you. We will make you a formal offer if you will it consider."

Jim sat down in the doorway, pulled off his hat and looked up into the German's face. Herr Gluck concisely and clearly outlined the work. Jim listened intently, then as Herr Gluck finished and waited for Jim's answer, the young engineer looked away.

He saw the Elephant dominating the river and desert, guarding and waiting—for what? Jim wondered. He saw the far road that he had built, winding into the dim mountains. For a long time he sat battling with himself in the flood of emotion that rose within him. It really had come, he realized, with Herr Gluck's offer. He actually was to turn his work over to another man to finish. The two older men watched him intently.

Finally Jim said: "The New England stock in this country is disappearing, Herr Gluck. Perhaps we are no longer needed. At any rate we haven't been strong enough to stay. This dam has been more than a dam to me. It has meant something like, 'Anglo-Saxons; their mark; by Jim Manning.' Some other man will finish the dam quite as well as I, but I don't think he will have my dream about it."

Herr Gluck leaned forward and said: "We all are Teutons, one family. That is why we always have quarreled. But we understand each other. Come to Germany and build for other Teutons, since they will not have you here."

"An expatriate! Poor dad!" muttered Jim. Then he said, in his quiet drawl, "I'll come, but you'll be getting only half a man."

The German looked away. He was a scientist, yet he was of a nation that had

produced Goethe as well as Weismann and his heart was quick to respond to truth, shot with the rainbow tints of vision.

"I know!" he said. "I know! Man needs the impulse of national pride and honor behind his mind. There are those that claim that they achieve for human kind and not for their own race alone. But I doubt it. After all, Goethe spoke for Deutschland, Darwin spoke for England. Therefrom came their greatness. And yet if they will not have you here, dear friend—Ach Himmel, I cannot urge thee! Come if thou wilt!"

Herr Gluck broke off abruptly to turn to Uncle Denny. "Who is the highest authority in this Service?"

"The Secretary of the Interior," said Uncle Denny. "Come, we must eat supper or Mrs. Flynn will be using force on us."

Jim took Herr Gluck over to the midnight train. The German was very quiet, but Jim was even more so. As Jim left him Herr Gluck said: "Keep a good heart, dear friend. I shall say a few truths myself before I have finished."

Jim shook hands heartily. "There is nothing to be done, Herr Gluck, but I'm grateful for your sympathy. You will hear from me about the new work," and he drove off in the darkness, leaving Herr Gluck in the hands of the ranchers Marshall and Miguel, who had spent the afternoon and evening at the dam, and were going to Cabillo by train.

Jim had received no answer from the Secretary of the Interior to his last letter. He was a little puzzled and hurt. There had been one flashing look pass between himself and the Secretary at the May hearing that had stayed with Jim as though it had declared a friendship that needed neither words nor personal association to give it permanence. Jim had counted on that friendship, not to save him his job, but to save his idea. No answer had come to his letter. Jim believed that the story of the interview with Freet had finally destroyed the Secretary's faith in his integrity.

Pen had written a long letter jointly to Jim and Uncle Denny some two weeks after leaving the dam. It was the first word they had had except through telegrams. Sara's will had been read. He had left Pen all his property, which was enough to yield a living income for her. Pen enclosed a copy of the note Sara had left her with his papers.

"You have always felt bitter at my stinginess. But I knew that I could not live long and I wanted to repay you for your care of me. I did not spend an unnecessary cent nor did I let you. I have been ugly but it didn't matter to you. I knew you didn't care for me and so I didn't try to be decent."

Uncle Denny shook his head over this note. "No human soul but has its white side, and there you are! I hope I'll never sit in judgment on another human being."

"Has she any comment on Sara's note?" asked Jim, who was resting on the couch while Uncle Denny read the letter to him.

Uncle Denny looked on the reverse side of the sheet. Pen had written: "This touches me very much. But when I consider the sources of poor Sara's money I can't bear to touch it. I am arranging to give it to the home for paralytic children. I hope that both of you will approve of my doing so."

The two men stared at each other and Jim said nothing. He was consumed by such a longing for Pen that he scarcely dared speak her name. But Uncle Denny nodded complacently and said:

"You can always bet on Pen!"

The day after Herr Gluck's visit there was to be a political rally of the Fleckenstein forces at Cabillo. To the great relief of Dennis and his two henchmen, Jim made no move to attend the meeting. The first concrete pouring on the last section of the foundation was to be made that day and Jim was engrossed with it. Fleckenstein was late in getting to the meeting. This, too, was better luck than the three conspirators had hoped for. The meeting was made up almost entirely of farmers who wanted to hear Fleckenstein's last statement of his pledges.

Before the chairman called the meeting to order, Oscar Ames mounted the platform and asked permission to say a few words while the audience waited for Fleckenstein. Oscar then put forth the great effort of his life.

He squared his great shoulders and threw back his tawny head.

"Fellow citizens, there is a great disgrace coming onto this community. You all know the Project engineer, James Manning. Well, there ain't been anyone who's fought him harder or made him more trouble till lately than I have. But lately, fellow citizens, I've got to know him. I tell you right now that he's the smartest

fellow that ever come into these parts. He's got some ideas that I'm not smart enough myself to understand, but I do know enough to realize that if he gets a chance to carry them out he'll make this Project the center of America!"

Oscar paused and someone called, "Go it, Oscar! Throw her in to low and you'll make it!"

"Well, fellow citizens, Fleckenstein and his crowd and all the rest of us, helping with kicks, have worked it so that Jim Manning has been asked to resign. They tell him that he's so unpopular here that the Service can't afford to keep him. Understand that? In other words, we farmers are such fools that we can't appreciate a good man just because his ideas differ from ours. But we can go crazy over a man like Fleckenstein because he'll take the trouble to jolly us. Fellow citizens, I ask you, are you going to sit by while the man that would make this Project into a valley empire is kicked out?"

Oscar stood for a moment glaring at his grinning hearers. Murphy climbed up beside him and shoved him aside.

"Down with the Irish!" yelled someone.

"You never paid me the fifty dollars you ran up for whiskey in my saloon, Henry," replied Murphy.

There was a roar of laughter and Murphy followed it quickly. "You all know me. I was in the saloon business in this valley for twenty years. But not one of you can say I wasn't on the straight all that time. The nearest I ever come to doing a man dirt was up in the dam. I was running a saloon just off the Reserve and Big Boss Manning jumped me and made me clean out my own joint. I was mad and I went up to the Greek there, who since is dead, for I heard the Greek was backed by Big Money with which he backed Fleckenstein to do the Service. Says I to myself, I'll help the Greek to do Manning.

"But the Greek cursed me out as I'll stand from no man. Then they took me to Manning and he treated me like a gentleman and asked me for my word of honor to keep off the Project. I know men. And I saw that the fellow I'd set out to do was a real man, carrying a load that was too big for the likes of me to sabez and that it made him sad and lonely. I was sick of the saloon business, anyhow, and when I got his number, I was proud to have been licked by him. Do you get me? Proud! And I says, I'm his friend for life and I'll just keep an eye on the pikers who are trying to do him.

"And I have. You know me, boys. You know that after the priest and the doctor it's the saloonkeeper that knows a man's number. Let me tell you that Fleckenstein is a crook. He'll steal anything from a woman's honor to a water power site. He's playing you folks for suckers. He's having everything his own way. Charlie Ives is the only fellow who's had the nerve to run against Fleckenstein and he's a dead one.

"And now Fleckenstein has done the Big Boss. He's made monkeys of you farmers. He's got you to roasting Manning till you've ruined him. And they ain't one of us fit to black his boots. This Project is his life's blood to him. There isn't anything he wouldn't sacrifice to its welfare. And you're throwing him out. Ain't a man's sacrifice worth anything to you? Will you take his best and give him the Judas kiss in return? Are ye hogs or men?"

There was an angry buzz in the room. Just as Uncle Denny started upon the platform, a tall lank farmer whom the man next him had been nudging violently, rose.

"My name's Marshall," he said, "and my friend Miguel here says I gotta get up and say the few things he and I agreed on last night. I'm mighty sick of hearing us farmers called fools. And now even the women folks have begun it. When our wives won't give us any peace maybe it's time we reformed our judgments. I'm willing to say that I think I've been mistaken about Manning. He came over to my place for the first time a few weeks back. I never talked with him before or got a good look at him. Boys, a man don't get the look that that young fella has on his face unless he's full of ideas that folks will kick him for. I felt kind of worked up about him then, but I didn't do anything.

"Last night I rode down to Cabillo with a Dutchman, some big bug who'd been up at the dam. I'd just been up there with Miguel. He told us that Jim Manning is attracting notice in the old country by the work he's doing on this dam. And he roasted us as samples of fat cattle who'd let a man like Manning go. At least that's what I made out, for he was so mad he talked Dutch a lot. Miguel and I made up our minds then that we'd got in wrong. What has this fellow Fleckenstein ever done for us? Is he going to get us branded over the country as a bunch that'll jump an honest debt? It looks to me as if Manning had done more for us than we knew. I'm willing to give Manning a new chance. I move we turn this meeting into a Manning meeting and I move we send a petition to the Secretary of the Interior to keep Manning on the job."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE THUMB PRINT

"I have been buffeted by the ages until I dominate the desert. So do the ages buffet one another until they produce a dominating man."

MUSINGS OF THE ELEPHANT.

Uncle Denny was on the platform before Marshall had ceased speaking.

"Friends, Mr. Marshall has said the thing we had in mind to present to this meeting. It was to be me share to ask you for a petition. 'Twill be the pride of Still Jim's life that the request came from a farmer and not from me. If all here will sign and if every man here will make himself responsible for the signatures of his neighbors, the thing can be done in a few days and we will wire the matter to the Secretary of the Interior. Friends, I'd rather see the tide turn for Jim than to see Home Rule in Ireland!"

The tide had turned. One of those marvelous changes of sentiment that sometimes sweep a community began in the wild applause that greeted the tender little closing of Uncle Denny's speech. When Fleckenstein arrived an hour late, he found an empty hall. His audience had dispersed to scour the valleys for signatures for Jim.

Uncle Denny came home to the dam, tired but with the first ray of hope in his heart that he had had for a long time. The petition might not influence the authorities and yet the sentiment it raised might defeat Fleckenstein at the last. At any rate, it was something to work for these last hard days of Jim's régime.

Jim had seen the last farmer and was devoting the final days of his stay on the dam to urging the work forward that he might leave as full a record behind him as his broken term permitted. Wrapped in his work and his grief, Jim did not hear of the existence of the petition. Henderson had spread word among the workmen of Jim's intended departure. No one cared to speak of the matter to Jim. Something in his stern, sad young face forbade it. But there was not a man on the job from associate engineer to mule driver who did not throw himself into his work with an abandon of energy that drove the work forward with

unbelievable rapidity. All that his men could do to help Jim's record was to be done.

For three days before the election Henderson scarcely slept. He tried to be on all three shifts. "I even eat my meals from a nose bag," he told Uncle Denny sadly.

"And what's a nose bag?" asked Uncle Denny.

"A nose bag is the thing you tie on a horse for him to get his grub from. Also it's the long yellow bag the cook puts the night shift's lunch in. But I'd starve if 'twould keep the Boss on the job. I'd even drink one of Babe's cocktails."

Henderson waited for Uncle Denny's "Go ahead with the story," then he began sadly:

"Algernon Dove was Babe's real name. He was an English remittance-man here in the early days. The Smithsonian folks came down here and wanted to get someone to go out with them to collect desert specimens, rattlers, Gila monsters, hydrophobia skunks and such trash. Babe and Alkali Ike, his running mate, went with them. They took a good outfit, the Smithsonian folks did, and in one wagon they took a barrel of alcohol and dumped the reptiles into it as fast as they found them. They got a good bunch, little by little, snakes and horned toads and hydrophobia skunks. In about two weeks they was ready to come back. Then they noticed the bad smell."

Henderson paused. "What was the matter?" asked Uncle Denny.

"Babe and Ike had been drinking the alcohol, day by day," he answered in his musical voice. "The barrel just did 'em two weeks. Just because I talk foolish talk, Mr. Dennis, ain't a sign that I don't feel bad. I don't want the Boss to speak to me or I'll cry."

The day of the election was a long one for Jim. He packed his trunk and his personal papers and Mrs. Flynn began to wrap the legs of the chairs in newspapers. Her tears threatened to reduce each wrapping to pulp before she completed it. In the afternoon, Jim started for a last tour of the dam. He covered the work slowly, looking his last at the details over which he had toiled and dreamed so long. He walked slowly up from the lower town. The men who passed him glanced away as if they would not intrude on his trouble.

The work on the dam was going forward as though life and death depended on the amount accomplished by this particular shift. Jim was inexpressibly touched

by this display of the men's good will, but he could think of no way to show his feeling.

Just at sunset he climbed the Elephant's back. But he was not to have this last call alone. Old Suma-theek was sitting on the edge of the crater, his fine face turned hawklike toward the distance. Jim nodded to his friend, then sat down in his favorite spot where, far across the canyon, he could see the flag, rippling before the office.

After a time, the old Indian came over to sit beside him. He followed Jim's gaze and said softly:

"That flag it heap pretty but wherever Injun see it he see sorrow and death for Injun."

Jim answered slowly: "Perhaps we're being paid for what we've done to you, Suma-theek. The white tribe that made the flag is going, just as we have made you go. The flag will always look the same, but the dream it was made to tell will go."

"Who sabez the way of the Great Spirit? He make you go. He make Injun go. He make nigger and Chinamans stay. Perhaps they right, you and Injun wrong. Who sabez?"

"I'd like to have finished my dam," Jim muttered. "Somehow we are inadequate. I woke up too late." And suddenly a deeper significance came to him of Pen's verse—

> "Too late for love, too late for joy;
> Too late! Too late!
> You loitered on the road too long,
> You trifled at the gate——"

"When you old like Suma-theek," said the Indian, "you sabez then nothing matter except man make his tribe live. Have children or die! That the Great Spirit's law for tribes."

Jim said no more. The daily miracle of the sunset was taking place. An early snow had capped the far mountain peaks and these now flashed an unearthly silver radiance against the crimson heavens. Old Jezebel wandered remotely, a black scratch across a desert of blood red. Distance indefinable, beauty

indescribable, once more these quickened Jim's pulse. Almost, almost he seemed to catch the key to the Master Dream and then—the scarlet glow changed to purple, and night began its march across the sands.

Jim made his way down the trail and up to his house. Waiting at his door were three of his workmen. They were young fellows, fresh shaved and wearing white collars. Jim invited them in and they followed awkwardly. They took the cigars he offered and then shifted uneasily while Jim stood on the hearth rug regarding them with his wistful smile. He was not so very many years older than they.

"Boss," finally began one of the men, "us fellows heard a few days ago that you were going to leave. We wanted to do something to show we liked you and what a—d—doggone shame it is you're going and—and we didn't have time to buy anything, but we made up a purse. Every rough-neck on the job contributes, Boss; they wanted to. Here's about two hundred dollars. We'd like to have you buy something you can remember us by."

The spokesman stopped, perspiring and breathless. His two companions came forward and one of them laid on the table a cigar box which, when opened, showed a pile of bills and coins. Jim's face worked.

"Boys," said Jim huskily, "boys—I'm no speaker! What can I say to you except that this kindness takes away some of the sting of going. I'll buy something I can take with me wherever I go."

"Don't try to say nothing, Boss," said the spokesman. "I know what it is. I laid awake all night fixing up what I just said."

"It was a darned good speech," replied Jim. "Don't forget me, boys. When you finish the dam remember it was my pipe dream to have finished it with you."

The three shook hands with Jim and made for the door. Jim stood staring at the money, smiling but with wet eyes, when Bill Evans' automobile exploded up to the house. Uncle Denny was sitting in the tonneau with two other men. Jim walked slowly out to the road. One of the men was the Secretary of the Interior; the other, a slender, keen-faced young man, was his private secretary. Jim's face was white in the dusk.

"Well, young man," said the Secretary, "you have been having some strenuous times since the Hearing. And for a man reputed to be unpopular, you have some good friends."

Bill Evans, almost bursting with importance, undid the binding wire that fastened the door of the tonneau and the Secretary arose.

"If you had telegraphed me, Mr. Secretary," Jim began with a reproachful glance at Uncle Denny.

"On me soul, Jimmy," said Uncle Denny, "I didn't know. I went over with Bill to meet someone else and——"

The Secretary laughed as he followed Jim. As Jim held open the door he said: "I didn't want to wire you, Mr. Manning. I wanted to find you on the ground, steeped in your iniquities. You have nice quarters," he added, sitting down comfortably before the grate fire. Then his eye fell on the cigar box full of money. "Ah, is that a part of the loot I hear you've been getting?"

Jim looked at the Secretary uncertainly. He was a large man with the keen blue eyes and the firm mouth in a smooth-shaven face that Jim remembered was like a fine set mask. Jim got nothing from staring into his distinguished guest's quiet eyes.

"This is a gift from the workmen on the dam," said Jim. "I am to buy something to remember them by. There are about two hundred dollars there, they tell me."

The Secretary nodded. "I am glad to hear that the men like you, Mr. Manning. What have you—Come in, madam!" The Secretary nodded to Mrs. Flynn, who had paused in the door with a tray load of dishes. She paused and looked uncertainly at Jim.

"Supper for four tonight, Mrs. Flynn," said Jim. "We have the Secretary of the Interior with us."

"My heavens!" gasped Mrs. Flynn. "God knows I never meant to intrude."

The Secretary laughed so richly and so heartily that all but Mrs. Flynn joined him. She gave the group of men a look of utter scorn, and said:

"I suppose if the Lord and the twelve disciples had dropped in unexpected, you men would think it funny and me with me legs all wrapped up in newspapers!" Then she bolted for the kitchen.

The Secretary wiped his eyes. "I hope I haven't seriously upset your household," he said to Jim.

Jim shook his head. "Your coming will be one of the great events of her life. Supper will be late but it will be well worth eating."

"Then," said the Secretary, "let us continue our private hearing. What have you been trying to do here on the dam, Mr. Manning?"

Jim stood on the hearth rug and glanced at each of the three men seated before him, his gaze finally resting on the Secretary's face.

"At first," he said, "I merely wanted to build the dam. I called it the Thumb-print that I would leave on the map, that should be emblematic of the old trail-making Puritan. But by a persistent indifference to their prejudices and to their personal wishes and welfare, I antagonized all the farmers on the Project."

Jim paused, hesitated and then went on. "The woman whom I shall one day marry pointed out to me that my attitude here was typical of the general attitude of the so-called Old Stock here in America. She said that I was willing to build the dam but unwilling to sacrifice time or effort to administering it, to showing the farmer how to handle the fine, essentially democratic, idea that was in the Reclamation idea. She said that we had formed the government in America and left it to others to administer and that of this we were dying."

Jim stopped and the Secretary said, "She seems intelligent, this young woman."

Jim's smile was flashing and tender as he said, "She is!" Then he went on, "You wrote me that the human element was the important matter here on the dam. This—friend—of——" Jim hesitated for a name for Pen.

"—of your heart," suggested the Secretary.

"Thank you," replied Jim gravely, "—of my heart said that I was doing only half a man's part and that that was what was losing me my job. So I have been trying to enlarge my Thumb-print. I want to leave it not only in concrete but in the idea that the Project shall embody the rebirth of the old New England ideal of equality not in freedom alone, but in responsibility. I hoped I might make every individual here feel responsible for the building of the dam, for the payment of the debt, and for the development of the Project for the best good of every human being on it."

Jim stopped, and the Secretary said, "Well?"

Again Jim's wistful smile. "I woke too late to get my idea across. My successor

comes tomorrow."

The Secretary shook his head. "I had no idea you were to leave so soon, though I will admit that after I read of your interview with Freet I rather lost interest in your doings. You know, I suppose, that Freet was asked for his resignation at the same time you were? Last week, however, just before we started on a tour of the Projects, a young lady called on me. She was very good looking and my secretary is not ah—impervious—to externals, so he allowed her quite a long interview with me."

The Secretary's eyes twinkled and young Allen laughed. "You see, that the Secretary took note of her personal appearance himself!"

Jim's face was flushed and amazed. The Secretary went on: "This young lady told me the details of the Freet visit and a good many other details that I'll not take time to mention. She was so clear and cool, yet so in earnest that I decided that I would leave my party at Cabillo and come on up for a talk with you, incognito, as it were, before they got here. To cap the climax, at Chicago I had a most remarkable telegram from a man named Gluck. I knew that a German engineer was looking over our Projects."

The Secretary smiled at the helpless expression on Jim's face. "Gluck, in about a thousand words, for which I hope his government will pay, told me that I was an enfeebled idiot or what amounted to that to let an engineering treasure like you leave the dam. I liked you, Mr. Manning, when I saw you at Washington. I thought, then, though, that you were on the wrong track and I hoped you could be lured onto the right one. I admit that I was much disappointed with your answer to my first letter and delighted with your second. I might have known that a woman had had her hand in so radical a change!" The Secretary's smile was very human as he said this.

"I don't know that I agree with you in your feeling of sadness about the going of the Old Stock. I am an enthusiast over the Melting Pot idea myself. But whatever the motive power within you, I heartily endorse your ideals for the Projects. But I am still not convinced that you are the man for your job, in spite of your engineering ability. Engineering ability is not rare. A great many engineers could build a dam. But a man to do the work you have outlined must have several rare qualities and not the least among these is the capacity for making many friends easily, of getting his ideas to the other man."

Jim's jaw set a little, but he answered frankly, "I know it, Mr. Secretary, and that

is just what I lack."

This was too much for Uncle Denny. "Mr. Secretary, those that know Jim are bound to him by ribs of steel. They——"

"Uncle Denny! Uncle Denny!" interrupted Jim, sadly, "even your faithful love cannot make a popular man of me! You must not try to influence the Secretary by your personal prejudice!"

Uncle Denny, with obvious effort, closed his lips, then opened them to say, "Still! Still! You break me old heart!"

The Secretary looked from the handsome old Irishman to the tall young engineer, whose face was too sad for his years and something a little misty softened the Secretary's keen blue eyes.

"You agree with me, Mr. Manning," he said gently, "that the capacity you seem to lack is essential for so heavy a task as you have outlined. It is a great pity to lose you to the Service, yet I cannot see how you can bring the Project to its best. I am considering how it will be possible to find men who have your engineering ability, your idealism, and this last rare, marvelous capacity for popularity."

Jim flushed under his tan. For the first time he spoke tensely. "Mr. Secretary, it's crucifying me to think I've fallen down on this."

"Don't let it break you," said the Secretary, looking at Jim with eyes that had looked long and understandingly on human nature. "Make up your mind to turn your forces into other channels. I want you to understand my position, Mr. Manning. Personally, I would do anything for you, for I like you. I hope always to count you as a friend. But as Secretary of the Interior, I must be a man of iron, always looking ahead to the future of our country. I dare not let myself show partiality here, lest our children's children suffer from my weakness."

Jim answered steadily, "Do you suppose I would hold my job as a favor, Mr. Secretary?"

"I know you wouldn't," replied the Secretary. "That is why I took the trouble to come to you personally. I told you that I was proud to feel myself your friend. And if you have lost, you have lost as a man must prefer to lose, Mr. Manning, in full flight, with the heat of battle thick upon you and not dragging out your days in a slow paralysis of futile endeavor."

"I thank you, Mr. Secretary," said Jim huskily.

"Can I put supper on now, Mr. Dennis?" asked Mrs. Flynn, in a stage whisper.

"You may," said the Secretary emphatically. "I don't like to seem impatient, Mrs. Flynn, but I'm famished."

Mrs. Flynn beamed, though eyes and nose were red from weeping. "I'll have it on in three minutes, your honor. Just hold your hand on your stomach, that always helps me, your honor. Boss," in another stage whisper, "I laid a clean shirt on your bed for you and you had better ask his honor if he don't want to wash up."

The Secretary was charmed. He rose with alacrity. "Mrs. Flynn, if you ever leave Mr. Manning, come straight to me. You are a woman after my own heart."

Mrs. Flynn curtseyed with the sugar bowl in her hand. "I thank you, your honor, but if God lets me live to spare my life, I'll never leave the Big Boss. He's my family! I'd rather rub my hand over that silky brown head of his than over a king's. God knows when I'll see him next, though——" and Mrs. Flynn's face worked and she dashed from the room.

After the wonderful supper which Mrs. Flynn at last produced, Jim exerted himself, with Uncle Denny's help, to entertain the Secretary. Young Mr. Allen went to call on the cement engineer, who was an old friend. It was not difficult to amuse the Secretary. He was as interested in details of the life on the Project as a boy of fifteen. Uncle Denny sent him into peals of laughter with an Irish version of Henderson's stories, and Jim's story of Iron Skull moved him deeply.

It was drawing toward nine o'clock when once more Bill Evans' rattle of gasolene artillery sounded before the door. A familiar voice called,

"Good-night, Bill!" and Penelope came into the room.

The men jumped to their feet and Uncle Denny hurried to take her bag. Jim did not seem able to speak. Pen shook hands with the Secretary.

"You are here, Mr. Secretary," she said. "I'm so glad!"

"So am I," said the Secretary, smiling appreciatively at Pen. In her traveling suit of brown, with her shining hair and her great eyes brilliant while her color came and went, Pen was very beautiful. She turned from the Secretary to Jim and

shook hands with him, with deepening flush.

"Hello, Still!" she said.

"Hello, Penelope!" replied Jim.

"Pen!" cried Uncle Denny breathlessly. "What's the news? As I promised, I've not been near the telephone, nor have I said a word here, though it's most suffocated me."

"Fleckenstein is defeated," said Pen.

"Oh, thank God for that!" cried Jim.

"How did it happen?" asked the Secretary.

Uncle Denny began to walk the floor. Pen answered. "A week ago, Mr. Secretary, a farmer named Marshall at a Fleckenstein meeting suggested that a petition be sent you to keep Mr. Manning here."

Uncle Denny interrupted. "Mrs. Saradokis here already had telegraphed us to do that same thing, Mr. Secretary, but we were glad to have the farmers get the same idea."

"That isn't important, Uncle Denny," said Pen. "Marshall himself wrote the petition. The farmers' wives caught the idea as eagerly as their husbands and you will find in many cases the signatures of whole families. Of course no man was going to petition for Mr. Manning, and then vote for Fleckenstein. So he was defeated. Here is the petition, Mr. Secretary."

Pen drew from her suitcase a fold of legal cap papers which she opened and passed to the Secretary. Her voice vibrated as she said: "It is signed by nearly every farmer on the Project, Mr. Secretary. Even the Mexicans wanted Jim to stay."

The Secretary put on his glasses and unfolded the numerous sheets. He looked them through very deliberately, then without a word, passed them to Jim.

The petition was a short one: "We the undersigned residents of the Cabillo Project petition that James Manning be retained as engineer in charge of the Project. We ask this because we like him and trust him and believe he will do more than any other man could do for the farmers' good. Signed——"

There was no sound in the room save the crackling of the papers as Jim's trembling fingers turned them. He was white to the lips. The Secretary looked from Jim to Pen, who was standing with close-clasped fingers, her deep eyes shining as she watched Jim. From Pen he looked at Uncle Denny, who was walking round and round the dining room table as though on a wager. Then the Secretary looked back at Jim.

"This petition pleases me greatly, Mr. Manning, and it will please the Director. He has grieved very much over the seeming necessity of letting you go. Of course this petition disproves all our statements about your capacity for making friends and for making your friends get your ideas." The Secretary chuckled. "Mrs. Flynn can remove the newspapers from all her legs tomorrow!"

Jim could not speak. He looked from face to face and his lips moved, but only his wistful smile came forth.

"Mr. Dennis," said the Secretary, "supposing you and I have a quiet smoke here while the Project engineer allows this young lady to take him out and explain to him how she came here."

"Mr. Secretary, you must have a drop of Irish blood in you!" cried Uncle Denny.

He pushed Pen and Jim toward the door. And Jim took Pen's hand and went out into the night.

They walked silently under the stars to the edge of the canyon and stood there looking across at the black outline of the Elephant.

"I went down to see the Secretary in Washington," said Pen, "and he was very kind, but I couldn't move him from his decision about your dismissal. Then when I wired Oscar about the petition, I decided that I was going to be in at the finish and present it to the Secretary myself. We came up from Cabillo on the same train. I made Bill drop me at the Hendersons' because I wanted to surprise you. Good old Bill! He went down to Cabillo and brought the petition up to me."

Jim held Pen's hand close in his own. "I can't seem to understand it all," he said. "I don't deserve it. Think of the farmers doing this! Aren't they a fine lot of fellows, though! Gee, Penny, there is going to be some great team work on this Project from now on! The water power trust won't be able to get in here with a hydraulic ram! What can they do with a prosperous and responsible group of farmers like these!"

"Jim," cried Penelope, "there is no limit to what I want you to do! This is just the beginning. After you have finished here, you must go to other Projects and after that, you must go to Congress and it will be war to the knife all the time. It's a wonderful future you are going to have, Still Jim."

Jim laughed happily. "And where will you be all this time, Penny? I understand that you are quite, quite through with marriage, and it will be very improper for you to keep on taking such an active interest in a bachelor's affairs. And yet this bachelor just can't go on without you!"

Pen answered evasively. "That's open to discussion. Jimmy, some day, you will buy back the old house at Exham."

"It would never be the same, with dad gone," said Jim.

"Even if your father were alive, Jimmy, it couldn't be the same," answered Pen. "It's just that the thought of the old house will always renew your old instincts, Still. You can't return Exham's old sweet days to it. But Exham has done its work, I believe, out here on this Project."

Pen's smile was very sweet in the starlight. Jim put both his hands on her shoulders.

"Do you love me, dear?" he asked.

Pen looked up into his eyes long and earnestly.

"I always have, Still Jim," she said.

"Do you want to know how I love you? Oh, sweetheart, I have so little to offer you!" he went on, brokenly, without waiting for Pen's answer, "except abiding love and passionate love and adoring love! And you are so very beautiful, Penelope. I've hungered for you for a long, long time, dear. Bitter, bitter nights and days up on the Makon and hopeless nights and days here on the Cabillo." His hands tightened on her shoulders. "Did you come back to me, sweetheart?"

"Still," whispered Pen, "I missed you so! I had to come back."

Then Jim drew Pen to him and folded her close in his strong arms and laid his lips to hers in a long kiss.

And the flag fluttered lightly behind them and the desert wind whispered above their heads:

"O yahee! O yahai!
Sweet as arrow weed in spring!"

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Transcriber's Note

Every effort has been made to replicate this text as faithfully as possible, including obsolete and variant spellings and other inconsistencies. Text that has been changed to correct an obvious error by the publisher is noted here. Corrections appear in brackets.

page 189: space added within word: "clumps, through draws and oversand[over sand] drifts.

page 190: typo corrected: with you, Bill, for a month. I fell[feel] well rested."

page 324: typo corrected: The stearing[steering] gear broke."

page 351: probable typo fixed for sense: There isn't anything he would[n't] sacrifice to its welfare.

In the advertisement: accents and typo fixed:

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